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MY INDIAN QUEEN

BEING A RECORD OF THE ADVENTURES OF SIR CHARLES VERRINDER, BARONET, IN THE EAST INDIES

1

BY

GUY BOOTHBY

AUTHOR OF DR. NIKOLA'S EXPERIMENT
PHAROS, THE EGYPTIAN, ETC.

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MY INDIAN QUEEN

CHAPTER I

INTO whatever other beliefs I might delude myself, there unfortunately could be no doubt about one thing; and that was the fact that only fifty golden guineas stood between me and hopeless, irretrievable beggary. What I was to do when they were spent I could not for the life of me say. There was the pistol, it is true; there was also the Fleet; the former alternative being, as may be supposed, infinitely the more preferable of the two. At any rate, I should not be the first of my race and acquaintance to enter those gloomy shades. And that sets me thinking of the strange manner in which a man's life is unconsciously shaped for him by his ancestors—those men of whom he knows almost nothing, and with whose very personalities he is only familiar by reason of their portraits. Let us gather some notable instances.

First there are the Hole-Careys, who, as far back as a man can remember, have gone to their graves through possessing too great a liking for the bottle; then the Harysforths, who for generations have encountered their deaths, sword in hand, upon the field of battle; next the Fitz-Matthews, who have no thought of anything that does not appertain to horse or hound, and have either broken their necks in pursuit of a fox or lost their all in finding the wherewithal to follow him. We Verrinders have acted somewhat differently, but the end has ever been the same; loyalty to our Sovereign and a contempt for parsimony have been our ruin. Had old grandfather Petre not attempted to vie with his master, the Merry Monarch of glorious memory, in the grandeur of his entertainments; had my own father not imagined himself a Crœsus, and after a week's hard play lost an entire fortune in ten casts of the dice, I, their descendant, would in all probability not have been standing with a little heap of gold upon my dressing-table representing all that was left of what, at my coming of age, had been an elegant patrimony. However, as the wise men say, what *must* be must; and here I was, in consequence, at the end of

my tether, dunned by the tradesmen who had once cringed for my patronage, owing three months' rent for the very room in which I now stood, and seeing nothing ahead but ruin, hopeless and irretrievable. This evil prospect, however, in no wise damped my ardour. As I dressed I hummed a snatch, fashionable with the town at the time; and, had my friends been there to see, not one could have told I was anything but the most prosperous man of fashion in the length and breadth of London.

As I looked upon the gold-topped dressing service, the multitude of patch and pull-villio boxes, and the silver chocolate service set out upon a side table, ready to my hand, it seemed difficult to believe I was so near the end. However, I was not in the humour to consider such things then, for was I not to meet the woman I loved best in the world at her Grace of Hampshire's house in Soho Square that evening? That the Earl of Castlefield desired a better match for her, and, looking unfavourably upon my suit, had even declared his intention of forbidding me both his countenance and his house, mattered little to me. Cicely and I had loved each other since the days when we had played together as chil-

dren, and, whatever pressure might be brought to bear upon her hand, I might count, at least, that her heart would remain true to me. Were it otherwise, I should be undone indeed. With a little shiver, which folk declare to be a warning against approaching calamity, I donned my roquelaure and descended to the street, where my chair had been awaiting me the greater part of an hour past. By the time I reached Hampshire House the ball was in full progress. The square outside was crowded with chairs, chariots, link boys, and all that strange admixture of humanity without which, it would appear, a great festivity can not be conducted with any degree of satisfaction to its giver.

It was a brilliant scene that met my eyes when I entered the house and mounted the grand staircase to the ballroom. Everyone who was anyone in England at that time was assembled there that night.

Whig and Tory alike had, for the moment, laid aside their differences and accepted his Grace's hospitality. Even Royalty itself was present — the King, accompanied, of course, by her stalwart Grace of Kendal. Fair Lady Harvey, hideous Lord Chesterfield, grave Sir Robert Walpole, and dashing

Bolingbroke, were to be observed among the throng. I made my bow to his Majesty and the Prince of Wales, and then wended my way across the room in search of the woman I loved. Only that forenoon she had given me a *rendezvous* beside the China God, the same for which his Grace had paid a fabulous sum only a fortnight before at the India House. She was not there, however; nor, though I searched with the utmost diligence, could I discover her in the room. Disappointed at my ill success, I was still searching when I descried her entering upon the arm of a man whom I hated to the very centre of my being. Town talk had it that he was the richest man in all England, and that tens of thousands were to him as are guineas to other people. Moreover, there were not wanting folk who declared that his money had come to him by practices which a gentleman would not soil his lips by mentioning. Be that as it may, however, the fact remains that he was well thought of by those who esteem money as much as blood, and who, were they called upon to choose between them, would be likely to declare in favour of the former. His name was Halliday, and in order that I may not be set down as alto-

gether uncharitable, I will admit that the rascal boasted some show of manner. He was tall, possessed a good figure, and carried himself like a man of resolution. I could have run him through, however, for presuming as he did that evening. The mere thought of that tiny hand resting upon his coat sleeve was as gall and wormwood to me. But it did not prevent me from approaching her. How beautiful she looked at that moment I can not hope to make you understand. Here, indeed, was high breeding personified. Of all the splendid women who at various times have graced that room, there has surely never been one fairer than the Lady Cicely Helderston, daughter and, indeed, only child, of that notorious old *roué*, the Earl of Castlefield. It was a distinction to be her friend, an honour I would dispute with all men to be her lover.

"I protest you are late, Sir Charles," she said, and I thought she spoke a little nervously. "Is it impossible for you to believe that even Time will not stand still for Sir Charles Verrinder?"

"I assure you, madam, you wrong me," I answered. "I was punctuality itself. I made my petition to the tiny god yonder at

the appointed moment, but, alas for me, in his pagan kingdom Venus was unknown."

I thought she appeared a little confused as I said this, but she carried the position with her accustomed skill.

"Perhaps I am not too late, even now, to lead you through a minuet?" I said, feeling somehow as if a cold hand were closing upon my heart.

"Nay," she answered, "why should it be? Hark! the musicians are tuning even now."

So saying, she curtseyed to Mr. Halliday, and permitted me to lead her down the room to the spot where the set was forming.

Though so many years have passed since that moment, the echo of the music still lingers in my memory; I can still feel the pressure of that little hand in mine, and see the gleam of the sweetest eyes of all the world gazing upward with a look now hopeful and now filled with a despair that seemed eternal. The dance at an end, his Majesty congratulated us in broken English upon our skill, and, when we had made our reverences in reply to his pretty speech, I led her to a quiet spot in an ante-room with which I was acquainted, and where I should be able to

inquire the meaning of the behaviour I was so little able to understand.

"Dear love," I said, as I seated myself beside her on a couch, "if my experience does not deceive me, there is something amiss with you to-night?"

She paused before she replied, and I noticed the hesitation.

"Why should there be aught amiss?" she answered at last, and with what I could see was an effort. "Am I not the same as I have ever been to you?"

"No, not the same," I replied. "There is something in your treatment of me to-night that frightens me, and yet I can not tell why."

"It is not like Sir Charles Verrinder to be frightened by a woman's whim," she answered, attempting an air of gaiety she was far from feeling.

"I fear no man," I returned. "But when you treat me as you are doing to-night, you frighten me beyond all telling."

"La! Sir Charles, you amaze me! What have I done that I should frighten you?"

"It is not what you have done, but what you have not done," I returned. "Oh, Cicely, can it be that you are growing tired

of me? That I am not to you what I was?"

"You speak in riddles," she faltered, her face deadly pale in the candle light. "I do not know what you mean. How am I treating you differently?"

"In a hundred ways," I answered vehemently, trying to take her hand, which she withdrew. "You were not at the trysting place, you were walking with Mr. Halliday, who is my rival, you call me Sir Charles, and are as distant to me as if we had met to-night for the first time."

"Nay, nay," she said almost angrily, "I protest it is not fair to bring these charges against me. Have I not danced with you? Am I not here with you now, when I should be in the ballroom?"

As I knew to my cost she possessed a temper that was apt at times to get beyond her control. Her eyes flashed fire upon me.

"'Tis ungenerous of you to talk thus to me," she said. "Am I not in enough trouble as it is? 'Tis not the work of a friend to seek to add to it."

In a moment all my animosity had vanished. When her anger had died down a little,

and her sweet eyes were filled with tears, I made an attempt to comfort her.

"Dear heart," I whispered, trying to obtain possession of her hand, and this time succeeding, "I was unkind to treat you so. If you are in trouble let me share it with you. Am I not he who loves you, and would I not do anything to save you pain? Tell me all!"

"It is impossible," she faltered, turning her face away from me. "Leave me to my own misery, for there is no girl in England so unhappy as I."

"You cut me to the heart," I answered. "What is troubling you? Tell me, and let me help you. Do you still love me, Cicely?"

She hesitated a moment before she replied, and then rose from her seat. Her face was as white as the dress she wore, and I could see that she was trembling. I tried to draw her to me, but she tore herself away. Once more I put the question to her.

"Cicely, tell me at least one thing. You love me, do you not?"

"Yes, I love you," she said softly, but it seemed to me that she spoke the words as if it were some guilty secret she was revealing to me. Then a light burst upon me.

"I see it all," I said. "This is your father's doing. He knows that I am ruined, and he is determined to force another marriage upon you? Is it not so? Nay, I can see it in your face. There is no need for you to answer me."

A silence fell upon us, and for upward of a minute neither of us spoke. When I had pondered on my position in my room, and knew that all was lost, I had not felt a tittle of the despair that was now settling upon my heart. What could I do? How should I act? The Earl of Castlefield was desperately poor. Cicely was his only child, and if the house were to be placed upon its feet once more vast sums would be needed. Halliday was the only man of the hour who could furnish them, so Halliday was chosen. Though Cicely and I had known and loved each other since childhood, I was to be thrown on one side and this wealthy Cit was to be preferred before me. Blind fool that I was, why had I not seen it coming? Even now, if only Cicely were willing, it was not too late to act. I turned to her and spoke with all the passion of which I was master.

"Dear love," I whispered fiercely, "say what you will, I know that you love me. I

know that you are mine. You do not love this man. Nay, 'twould be an insult to suggest it to you. You will not let them force such a union upon you? Can you be brave? Will you trust yourself to me? I have been an idle spendthrift hitherto, but for the future all shall be changed. Trust your life to me and let us fly together. There is Parson Keith ready at any moment in his chapel in Curzon Street to make us one. Dare you defy them for my sake?"

"It is impossible," she sobbed. "It is quite impossible."

"It is not impossible," I answered. "I speak in earnest. We love each other, and where love is, nothing is impossible. Say but the word, and I will seek out Parson Keith as soon as 'tis light, and have him ready to perform the service. We can meet at his chapel, and once you are my wife we will leave London and hide till the storm has blown over. Your father will be furious at first, without doubt, but he will forgive us in the end."

She shook her head.

"And how are we to live in the meantime?" she asked. "We have both been brought up in luxury. I know that you are

ruined, hopelessly ruined, and I have not a penny piece of my own."

I groaned in bitterness. Her words were only too true. Even if we did fly together, I had not the wherewithal to provide for her even for a month; indeed, for all I knew to the contrary, I might be in the Fleet before the sunset on my wedding-day. I had it in my heart to curse the hour I was born. And yet, desperate as everything was, I could not let Cicely be torn from me without an effort to prevent it.

I drew her to me, I implored her to trust herself to me, let the future be what it might. My pleadings, however, were in vain.

"It would be madness," she cried, "the most incurable madness. We are neither of us used to poverty, and we should perish of starvation in a week. Have I not my father to think of also? He is old and feeble, and 'tis my duty to see that his declining years are spent in comfort."

"And to do this you are prepared to sacrifice our love?" I returned. "In order that he may have the wherewithal to live as he has done, you are willing to break my heart? He has not been a good father to you, Cicely; he bears a name that is——"

"Hush, hush," she said, turning to me once more, "remember that you are speaking to his daughter."

"I remember nothing but that I am speaking to the woman who is breaking my heart," I cried furiously. "Your love for me must have been but a pretence, since you can throw me aside so easily. The protestations you have so often made can only have been false, and you——"

"Sir," she said, drawing herself up to her full height and looking like a tragedy queen, "you speak in a manner I can not tolerate. You must pardon me if I leave you."

Then with flashing eyes she swept past me and left the room. For some seconds I stood gazing after her. Happiness seemed to have gone out of life for me. Ruin I would have borne cheerfully, had Cicely remained true to me, but under this double burden of sorrow I tottered and seemed like to fall. Then, as I thought of my rival, a change came over me, and an overwhelming rage took the place of my former sorrow.

Leaving the ante-room, I returned to the ballroom once more, in the hope of meeting Halliday. I had a plan in my mind, and was desirous of putting it into execution. If I

were ruined and Cicely were false to me, I would at least prevent him from triumphing over my discomfiture. But he was not to be found there. On the stairs I encountered Lord Pomeroy, flushed with wine.

"Whither away, Charles, my lad?" he said, steadying himself with his hand against my shoulder. "Egad, man! but you are as white as a ghost. A bumper of his Grace's champagne will put new life into ye."

Nothing loth, I followed him, and tossed off a bumper of the generous wine. It rendered me good service in one respect, but it was harmful in another. Under its influence, the rage which had hitherto consumed me changed to a dull and sullen fire, that was no less destructive because it did not burn so fierce.

"Whither away, now?" cried George, who had by this time taken more wine than was good for him, and would soon have to be carried off to bed by his chairmen—a duty which they fulfilled with the regularity of clockwork.

"To raise all the demons in hell!" I answered, and left him to derive what satisfaction he could from my answer. Then I descended to the hall and bade my lubberly

chairman proceed home without me, as I intended walking as far as Bloomsbury Square.

Donning my cloak, I set off. It was a fine starlight night, with a touch of frost in the air. The cold revived me, but did not deter me from the course I had in view. The wine had set a seal upon that, and my resolve was as irrevocable as the laws of the Medes and Persians. It was on the stroke of eleven o'clock as I turned into the square in which the Earl of Castlefield had his residence. The square itself was thronged with chariots and chairs, but the house to which I was bending my steps was, with the exception of one window, in total darkness. I ascended the steps and knocked upon the door, which was presently opened to me by the Earl's ancient servitor, a man I had known ever since my boyhood. He seemed surprised to see me, and when I asked to be conducted to his master made as though he would answer me with an excuse. I would have no denial, however, and bade him convey my name to his lordship, my business with him being peremptory and particular. In order that there might be no chance of my plan miscarrying, I followed him along the tiled passage, and when he entered the dining-hall my sus-

picions proved to be well founded, for Halliday was there, seated at the table, while beside the sea-coal fire, one swathed-up leg upon a stool (for he was a martyr to gout), sat the Earl himself.

"Sir Charles Verrinder craves permission to speak with your lordship——"

The old man had got so far when I interrupted him.

"Sir Charles Verrinder will ask permission himself, by your leave," I said, stepping into the candle light. "My lord, I would ask the indulgence of an interview, alone."

Halliday rose and looked at me across the table. A glass of port stood at his elbow, and his usually sallow face was a little flushed with the wine he had taken.

"With your lordship's permission, I will withdraw," he said, in a voice somewhat thicker than usual.

The Earl, however, would not hear of it.

"Sit ye down!" he cried with a wave of his hand. "You are in my confidence, and whatever Sir Charles Verrinder may have to say to me, I am willing that you should hear."

Then, turning to me, he added—

"Speak on, sir, and be brief. What is it you desire to say to me?"

"I am come to ask your lordship's permission to make your daughter my wife," I answered boldly. "We have loved each other since our childhood."

The old man laughed sardonically, while Halliday shifted uneasily upon his seat.

"It is plain that Sir Charles Verrinder entertains a better opinion of his own merits than do his friends, since he deems himself in a position to maintain a wife," said the old man with a diabolical sneer. "It has been rumoured that matters were somewhat differently situated, or I have been misinformed."

The insult was intolerable, but I tried to remember that he was Cicely's father.

"You are an old man, sir," I said, "and Cicely would never forgive me if I harmed a hair of your head. With Mr. Halliday here, however, I am better able to deal, as I shall hope presently to prove. For the last time, my lord, let me beg of you to listen to my suit. We love each other and would be happy together. My name is as familiar to you as your own. I am not the rich man I once was, I will admit, but give me time, and

I will win back for myself that place in the world of which my own follies have deprived me. There are those who will gladly help me to a position of honour and profit. Sir Robert Walpole, I am sure, will do his best."

I could not have said a more foolish thing, for it was not until later, when I came to reconsider all that had transpired at our interview, that I remembered the fact that the Earl and Walpole were deadly enemies, and that to mention his name and our friendship at such a moment was to have the same effect as to wave a red flag in front of an angry bull.

"Damn ye, sir!" cried the old man, "if 'tis your wish to insult me, you could not do so better than by naming that man in my presence. Egad! if I were not chained here like a dog, I'd chastise you with my own hand!"

He made as if he would rise, but the exertion was too much for him, and he fell back in his chair, his face livid with impotent fury.

I thought it was an apoplectic seizure that had taken possession of him and was going to his aid, but he waved me off with a feeble movement of his hand. A moment

later he had recovered sufficiently to speak again.

"Out of my house! out of my house!" he cried. "Hesitate, and my lackeys shall turn ye into the street!"

This was more than my temper could brook.

"I am to take it, then, that you refuse me her hand?" I said. "Let me set the proper value upon my position."

"To the devil with you and your position!" he stormed. "Hark ye, sirrah; I refuse her to you as I would refuse her to her chairman, and that's enough for you to know. Now go."

"I will go," I answered more calmly than I had yet spoken. "But before I do so, let me say this, my lord; if I may not win her for my wife, Mr. Halliday, there, shall not. 'Tis not meet to cast pearls before swine."

Halliday sprang to his feet with a cry.

"One moment, Mr. Halliday," said I; "let us talk this matter over rationally. 'Tis not my rule to do myself the dishonour of crossing swords with Cits, but as his lordship here has admitted you to his intimacy, the matter stands upon somewhat different ground. I am at your service whenever you

may be prepared to meet me. In the meantime, lest you should chance to forget the appointment, let me endeavour to impress it upon your memory."

So saying, I took from the table the glass of wine he had just poured out for himself, and tossed the contents full and fair into his face.

"There, sir," I said, "that is for remembrance. I shall do myself the further honour of running you through the ribs as soon as it will be convenient to you to give me the opportunity. Gentlemen, I am your most obedient, humble servant."

With that I bowed to them and left the room. The old butler awaited me in the hall with a frightened face.

"Oh, Sir Charles! Sir Charles!" he began as he saw me, wringing his hands and making a piteous face. "To think that it should come to this!"

"Silence, rascal!" I answered, "and pay attention to what I say to you. When your mistress returns you will give this message to her. Say that Sir Charles Verrinder has had an interview with his lordship and has met with no success. He trusts, however, that he has arranged matters with Mr. Halli-

day so satisfactorily that they will come to an early understanding with each other. Is it possible for you to remember?"

He promised to do so, and in return I bestowed upon him a guinea. Then I set off on my return to my lodging, laughing to myself as I thought of the picture Halliday had presented when he stood before me with the wine streaming down his face. After that I fell to wondering when he would arrange a meeting, and what the end of it all would be. 'Twas something, at such a moment, to recall my reputation as a swordsman, and to bear in mind that, ruined though I might be, it was still in my power to prevent this man from plucking the fruit that was mine by every canon of right and justice.

In this manner I stepped briskly along toward Golden Square. When I was almost there, however, I changed my mind and wended my way toward Tom Skevingdale's house in Gerrard Street. After the excitement of the evening I was by no means in the humour for bed, nor, for that matter, for anything else save to have matters settled, and Halliday at the point of my rapier. When he was dead I did not care very much what became of me. I might enlist and fight

for his Majesty against his enemies, or ship as a gentleman adventurer to the Virginias, where rumour had it there was always a chance that a ruined man might in time recoup himself. For the present I craved any excitement that would prevent me from thinking. And I could not have come to a better place for it had I searched all London through. As usual, Tom's house was in an uproar. In his parlour were gathered together some fifteen or twenty of the keenest bloods in London—mohawks, kit-cats, nickers and spendthrifts—every one of them as nearly ruined as myself.

My coming was greeted with applause. Glasses were raised in my honour, and on every hand the welcome was both hearty and sincere.

"Egad, man, you've come at the right time," cried Skevingdale, coming forward to receive me. "Dick Poynder, here, is invincible to-night. He carries all before him, and the company is bankrupt in consequence."

"'Tis well that Luck should favour me some time or another," quoth Dick, still rattling the dice-box in his hand. "Of late the jade has been frowning upon me night and

day. Come, Charles, let us try a throw together. Who knows but that you may prove my downfall?"

Nothing loth I seated myself and permitted him the first cast, though in courtesy he should have given it to me. I followed and won.

"'Tis as I said," he cried. "Let us not waste time talking, but to work with all seriousness. I will wager you fifty guineas upon the throw."

"Agreed!"

Once more I won. The golden guineas chinked upon the table, but the sound gave me no pleasure. What I wanted was fiercer and deeper excitement. Cicely's pale, imploring face seemed to be looking at me across the table, and its beauty tore my heart in twain. Fickle, indeed, is the Goddess of Chance. When I had been playing for half an hour no less than four hundred guineas lay upon the table before me. The crowd about us pushed to see our play. 'Twas a night to be remembered. Poynder still smiled, though at the moment he was hovering on the brink of ruin.

"For a last main I will wager you four hundred guineas against all you have there."

"Play on," I said, and we threw.

This time his luck changed, and he won. I pushed the heap of gold across to him and emptied my own pockets upon the table.

"There are forty-nine guineas here," I said. "It's all or nothing now."

We threw, and once more he won.

"A good cast," I said, and drank off the wine which Skevingdale had placed at my elbow.

An hour later I left the house a penniless man.

Fate had not been propitious to me that evening, and, as I turned into Greek Street, I wondered what the next act of the drama would be. Suddenly I felt a hand placed upon my shoulder. On turning about I found myself face to face with two men, one of whom, the taller, acted as spokesman.

"Have I not the honour of addressing Sir Charles Verrinder?" said the knave.

"That is my name, rascal," I replied. "What is it you want with me?"

"The favour of your lordship's company," answered the fellow, drawing a little closer as he spoke. "We hold a warrant for your commitment to the Fleet on the suit of Joshua Kerdoff, at the sign of the Golden

Hand, in St. Paul's Churchyard. Nay, your honour," he continued, seeing that I was about to struggle, "'twould be of no use your resisting us, for I have more men at hand should assistance be necessary."

I knew then that it was all over with me, for Joshua Kerdoff was one who had advanced me large sums of money upon certain securities, which had since proved valueless. He had vowed that, if he were not repaid in full, he would commit me to the tender care of Mr. Bambridge. This, it was plain, he was now about to do.

"Is it to be the Fleet or the Sponging House?" I inquired.

"The Fleet, an' may it please your Honour," the fellow replied. "We have a coach at hand in which to take you."

At his signal, his companion gave a loud whistle, and immediately a coach made its appearance and pulled up before where we stood.

"If your Honour will be pleased to enter, we will set off at once," said the man who had first spoken.

I accordingly got in, the others accompanying me.

"How did you know where to find

me?" I asked, as we rattled toward the Strand.

"We called at your Honour's lodgings and learned that you were absent at the Duchess of Hampshire's ball; thence we followed you to the Earl of Castlefield's residence in Bloomsbury Square, only to find that you had left. By chance we learned of your visit to Sir Thomas Skevingdale's house in Gerrard Street, and waited for you to come forth. 'Twould have saved us much travelling about, and your Honour some guineas, if we had caught you at your own house."

"You will get no guineas from me," I answered stoutly. "I haven't a coin in the world. I fancy Mr. Bambridge is destined to be disappointed this time."

"Perhaps he will find a way of obtaining some," said the rascal impertinently. "'Tis a pleasant place is the Fleet when one's pockets have a golden lining, and at all times the company is of the best. Without money, however, I fancy 'tis better to be out of it."

I recalled all I had heard of that terrible place, and of the cruelty that the villain, Bambridge, had perpetrated on poverty-stricken humanity. As the man had said, I was like to fare ill if I could not find the

wherewithal to satisfy his rapacity. I do not think I am a coward, but I must confess that a trembling seized me as I thought of the tales I had been told of him. Without a friend to intercede for me, I might lay for ever in the prison. This, indeed, seemed more than likely when I came to consider the number of writs my arrest would certainly bring down on me. There is none so polite as your cringing tradesman so long as he can obtain his money; there is none so vindictive when it is denied him.

At this hour the streets were well-nigh empty, so that we could proceed at a brisk pace. The smell and the rattle of the coach, however, was intolerable to me; and, bad as the prospect was like to be at the other end, I could not restrain a feeling of relief when at last we reached our destination.

Once inside those grizzly portals, I was brought into the presence of Bambridge himself, who, when money-making was going forward, was to be found at his post night and day. His coarse face ventured upon a smile when he beheld me. Believing my pockets to be lined with guineas, he affected a politeness which I knew to be false.

"'Tis sad to see you here, Sir Charles,"

he said, bowing low before me. "But doubtless 'tis merely a misunderstanding on Kerdoff's part. To-morrow, perhaps, matters will be arranged, and you will be released with my apologies for having detained you. In the meantime, you will require a comfortable room, lights, attendance, and possibly a bottle of our best. There are certain fees, the whole amounting to, perhaps, some sixty pounds. If you have the amount upon you, the matter can be at once arranged and your night's rest not disturbed."

"Sixty pounds!" I cried, looking the rascal in the face, with a laugh. "Why, man, 'tis impossible for me to scrape together sixty pence. Had you caught me earlier in the evening you would have had a haul; but, as it is, you have come too late."

"That being so, I fear it is unlikely you will sleep so well," he answered; and turning to his myrmidons, he continued: "Perhaps in the morning, when he has had a look at his bedfellows, we shall hear a different tale."

With that I was hurried away, down a long corridor, at the end of which a door was unlocked. We entered, and by the light of the lantern my guide carried in his hand I found myself standing in a room, crowded

with the filthiest scum of humanity upon which I had ever set eyes. Before I had time, however, to make out what I should do, or to choose a resting-place, the door was closed and locked behind me, and, for the first time in his life, Sir Charles Verrinder was an imprisoned debtor, without a shilling in the world. Only three hours before I had been the guest of the noblest in the land, consorting with kings and princes; now I was in the Fleet without a penny piece. So does the pendulum of Fate swing backward and forward in a man's life.

CHAPTER II

THE thoughts that possessed me for some time after the door had closed behind me, it would be impossible to describe. The change that had come into my life was so sudden—I could, perhaps, scarcely say with truth, so unexpected—that the sudden transition from light to darkness, from gaiety to despair, came near to throwing me off my balance altogether. Nor was the glimpse I had had of the room, by the light of the turnkey's lantern, of a nature calculated to reassure me as to my personal safety; and I resolved that the rest of the night should not be spent in any closer proximity to my unsavoury bedfellows than I could help. It was a night to remember all a man's life long, and I am quite ready to believe that certain incidents connected with it will remain with me as long as I am capable of recalling anything associated with my past. In the first place, it must be borne in mind that I was still clad in my heliotrope and silver, and, since it was scarcely likely that I should

be able to replenish my wardrobe for some little time to come, I was the more resolved that I would not soil it by stretching myself out in the filth that covered the floor. For this reason, I wrapped my cloak more closely round me, and, standing with my back against the wall, prepared to pass the hours of darkness in an upright position. More than once during the night men talked aloud in their sleep; one called upon Bambridge, imploring him to cease from torturing him, while another spoke of a dying wife and starving children, and begged leave to visit them. The stench of the room was well-nigh unbearable, and I bethought me of the tales I had heard of fevers bred in such places, and of men with smallpox on their bodies confined with others in the same small space. I believe that the mere thought of such evils caused me more unhappiness than all my other troubles put together.

'Twas a little before dawn, an hour or even two, maybe, when a circumstance occurred which showed me something of the class of men with whom I had to deal. At the moment, I was thinking of all that had happened on the night before, and was wondering what Cicely would say when the news of my arrest

should be carried to her. Suddenly I felt the touch of a cold hand upon my cheek, and a moment later a set of clammy fingers were clutching at my throat. So dark was the room, however, that no part of my assailant was visible to me; I could only feel those loathsome fingers gripping my flesh. Whether the motive was robbery or murder, I can not say; it is sufficient that, before the villain could accomplish his purpose, I had sprung aside and hit out with a blow from the shoulder, with all the strength of which I was master. Fortune favoured my endeavour, and my fist went home upon a human countenance. There was the sound of a heavy fall, then the noise of a man creeping away, and, for upward of an hour, a low moaning as of an animal in pain.

"I shall die a madman if I have to spend my days here," said I to myself, drawing my cloak closer about me as I did so. "Oh! will dawn never come?"

After what seemed an eternity, day broke, and with his coming I looked about me. Pray, gentle reader, that you may never see such a sight as I had before me then. Since that time I have visited many places, and have seen some of the foulest dens upon the earth,

but never, in all my experience, have I met with anything that could equal that room in the Fleet in which I was imprisoned. 'Twas a large apartment, measuring some sixty feet in length by, maybe, twenty in width. High in the wall, at the further end, was a grated window, thickly covered with dust and cobwebs. On the left was a door, leading, as I could see, to the common yard outside; it was the filth, however, the reek, the hopeless misery of its occupants, that put the finish to the picture. The latter were of all ages, and might have once been, that is to say before their misery fell upon them, of all conditions. Several were, or made a pretence of being, ministers of religion; one, and if my memory serves me he was the merriest of the pack, still wore the pink that had once distinguished him as a follower of the chase. Another had been a fashionable physician in his days of prosperity, and had counted his patients by the score; two were soldiers, another had been an actor, while yet another had earned distinction as a lawyer, but drink and gambling had brought about his fall. Many, if not most of them, had been drunk on the previous night, and now were scarcely sober. Others had been fighting, and carried wounds in evidence of

the fact. For the latter reason, it was impossible for me to tell who it was who had attacked me during the night, but there was one fellow whom I shrewdly suspected. His upper lip was cut and was still bleeding profusely; I noticed also that he would not meet my gaze. I said nothing to him, however, upon the subject. Long after it was light I stood, as I had done in the darkness, looking down on the sleeping forms before me, and thinking of the change in my life that the last few hours had wrought. At last there was some show of movement among the sleepers, and for the first time one of my fellow prisoners approached and addressed me. As I soon discovered, he was a poor madman, whose brain sorrows, and the remorseless cruelty of a creditor, had conspired to turn. In his former life he had been a respectable mercer in Cheapside, and a liveryman of the City; now, however, he imagined himself one of the King's Ministers of State, and bore himself accordingly. With an expression of the greatest gravity, he approached the place where I stood, rubbing his hands together as he came, and bowing low at every step.

"If your lordship is anxious to secure an audience with his Majesty," he said, coming

to a standstill before me, " I will endeavour to arrange it. I, myself, shall be seeing him in the forenoon concerning the latest news from France. It will afford me the liveliest satisfaction to lay your lordship's case before him."

Then, with another bow, and a caution as to secrecy, he left me and returned to his miserable pallet, upon which he seated himself with as much solemnity as if it had been a chair of state. One of the divines was the next to approach me. He addressed me with a smug countenance, and was good enough to make me acquainted with the reasons that had brought him so low. Finally, when he had attempted to borrow a guinea of me, and had failed, he cursed me roundly for the waste of words I had put him to, and in his turn withdrew to make merry with several of his companions at my expense. By eight o'clock all the occupants of the room, with one exception, were up and about. I noticed that scarce one bestowed any care or thought upon his toilet, many contenting themselves solely with a shake, such as a spaniel gives when he leaves water. Then, passing out into the yard, they bathed themselves in the faint watery sunshine that was creeping in

over the adjacent roofs. I followed their example, and wondered at my folly in not having tried the door before. At least, in the yard, the air was pure. Later on a meal was served to us, consisting of water, conveyed in large pitchers, and bread, such as I would not have asked my chairmen to eat. Those who were happy in the possession of money were at liberty to purchase what they wanted; those who had none were perforce compelled to eat or go without. Being of the latter class, and finding my stomach rebel at the bread, I had no remedy but to fast, and fast I did. A nice position, truly, for one who, only a few hours before, had been his Grace of Hampshire's guest, and the companion of Royalty itself. The better to hide my mortification, I paced up and down the yard, cudgelling my brains for some loophole of escape. But, alas, I could discover none. There was only one thing that could get me out of the prison and that was money, of which I had none. To hope for mercy from Kerdoff was only to waste my time; and, indeed, had I had the good fortune to be able to pay him off, the other rogues would have come down upon me like wolves upon the fold, and I should have been as ill-served

as before. With good reason might I feel that happiness had gone out of my life forever. The woman I loved was being forced into marriage with my enemy, and here was I in the Fleet Prison, where, it would seem, I should stay for the remainder of my life.

I had arrived at this point in my musings when I noticed a change in the behaviour of the men at the further end of the yard —that is to say, near the door which led into the room in which we had passed the night. Hitherto they had been occupying themselves with jests at my expense, which, let it be understood, I had feigned not to notice. Now they suddenly ceased and looked toward the door, as if they expected the appearance of some one to whom such ribaldry would be offensive. A moment later there issued forth a being the like of whom I had, and have, never seen before. He was a man by the side of whom one of his Majesty's Guards would have seemed a stripling. His weight would have turned the scale at twenty stone, yet he bore himself with an ease and grace that was as amazing as everything else about him. His face was large, fleshy, and very red; his eyes, however, were pleasant to look upon, while his voice, when he spoke, was, as I soon

discovered, of singular sweetness—so sweet, indeed, that having heard it once, the hearer experienced a desire to do so again. It was a strange thing in a man so huge, and one that was difficult to account for. Nevertheless, it spoke in his favour and added to the attraction of his other singular attributes.

Throwing a glance of scorn at the men beside the door, this enormous individual came toward me, seeming to fill the whole yard with the grandeur of his presence.

"Am I right in supposing that I have the honour of addressing Sir Charles Verrinder?" he inquired by way of introduction.

"The same," I answered, looking him up and down, and taking in his magnificent proportions as I did so. "'Tis a name, I believe, that is known to the town."

"And as highly esteemed as known," he answered, with yet another bow. "Permit me to present myself to you as Captain O'Rourke, a soldier of fortune, once of County Kildare, but now lodged in the Fleet Prison, through no fault of his own, and, bedad, though it shames me to own it, for a sum as small as his ability to discharge it."

With that he handed me his snuff-box with the air of a Sovereign conferring upon

a subject the greatest honour in his power. The box was exceedingly beautiful, chased and ornamented with the figures of gods and elephants, and I was filled with wonderment at his possession of it.

"Honour me by accepting it," said he, when I had expressed my admiration, "'tis a trifle presented to me by the Great Mogul."

"The Great Mogul?" I cried in wonderment, for I could scarcely believe he was not jesting with me. "Is it not the Great Mogul that travellers tell us sits upon a throne of beaten gold, and who drinks from a goblet cut from a single diamond?"

"That, and a thousand other and still more marvellous tales are told concerning him," returned my companion with the greatest seriousness; "yet, if the truth were known, the wildest comes not within a gunshot of the splendour of the truth."

He spoke with such an air of simplicity that I, who, for a moment, believed him to be a liar of extraordinary capacity, scarcely knew what to think.

"You have paid a visit to the Indies, perhaps?" I said, looking up at him and wondering what sort of man this was with whom I had to deal.

"I have but lately returned thence," he answered. "Believe me, seeing my present plight, I could find it in my heart to wish I were back again."

As he said this, he looked round the gloomy yard at our fellow prisoners, then up at the dull gray sky overhead, and finally back at me. "'Tis a pity I ever left it, since it was for this," he muttered, half to himself and half to me. "To think that I, Aloysius O'Rourke, who has dictated terms to Kings and Emperors, who has been loved by Queens, and who has held treasure in his hand sufficient to buy up London City, should now be lying in the Fleet, and, a curse upon it, for a debt of fifty snivelling pounds."

He finished his speech with a sigh that was like the groaning of a wounded bull, then slapped his enormous chest, blew out his cheeks, and continued:

"But there, we'll have no grumbling in the Camp. Repining is for maids and cowards, and 'The O'Rourke' is neither."

He took two or three paces up and down the yard, and then returned to my side. The clergyman, the same who had endeavoured to borrow a guinea from me that morning, chanced to pass at the moment, and, in

avoiding the bench beside which we stood, approached so close to my companion that the hem of his gown brushed the tail of the other's coat. In a moment the latter was in a fury, and, whipping round, had seized the unfortunate divine by the nape of his neck and was holding him in the air, shaking him as a terrier shakes a rat.

"Hark ye, Sirrah," he cried in a voice of thunder, addressing the man he held aloft, "I have warned ye before to keep your distance from my person. One more trick of this sort and I will shake the life out of ye, if I have to ride to Tyburn for it."

Then, without appearing to realize the feat he had accomplished, he dropped the fellow, who scuttled away out of reach as a rabbit dives into its burrow. When he had vanished, the Captain once more turned to me, and, motioning me to the bench to which I had referred, suggested that we should seat ourselves.

"After a fortnight of this place," said he, "'tis vastly pleasant to a man of breeding to find a companion with whom he can associate. These dogs, if they did not fear me as they do the devil, would pull me down like a jackal, and sell my clothes to obtain the

wherewithal to gratify their drunken longings."

He had no sooner said this when a notion occurred to me. It was strange that I should not have thought of it before. Were there not buckles on my shoes, a watch in my fob, and rings upon my fingers, all of which might be turned into money if I were so minded, which I certainly was? I said as much to the Captain, who entered into the scheme with a heartiness that did as much credit to his companionable feeling as it did to his readiness of resource. He took them from me, weighed them carefully in the palm of his hand, and set a value upon them; next he examined the watch and also put a price upon it. The rings followed the watch, and my pin followed the rings.

"Shall we say thirty pounds for the handful?" he inquired, bringing his great red face close to mine and speaking in a low voice so that the others should not hear. "'Tis less than a quarter of their value, but we're soldiers of misfortune, and must take what we can get or go without."

Thirty pounds! Why, this seemed like a gold mine to me, and yet in bygone days I

had paid a far larger amount for the very lace ruffles on my sleeves.

"Let us be rid of them at once," I said, "but in what manner are we to do it? These men have no money, and 'twould be folly to trust them to the turnkey to sell outside."

"We should see neither rings nor money again if we did that," answered the Captain. "Do me the honour of entrusting them to my care, and rest assured I will find some means of disposing of them."

I did so without second thought, and in this lies, what I would have you agree with me is, a most strange and characteristic circumstance. An hour before, I had never set my eyes upon the man now seated by my side; and yet here I was, trusting him, without fear of the issue, with all I had in the world. Be that as it may, it is certain my confidence was not misplaced.

That afternoon, with the assistance of a turnkey, whom it was necessary to bribe, an old Jew was smuggled into the yard. The Captain thereupon discussed the matter with him, and, when the rascal took his departure, came to me and placed thirty-five guineas in my hand.

"'Twas the best I could do," he said rue-

fully, as if he feared he had incurred my displeasure. "I had hoped that I might have been able to screw fifty out of the fellow, but thirty-five was all that he would give."

So overjoyed was I at getting the money —small sum though it was—that I ventured so far upon our newly made friendship as to offer the Captain a commission on the transaction. In an instant he was another man. He sprang to his feet, his eyes flashed, and his voice, when he spoke, was like the roll of distant thunder.

"Have a care, have a care," he roared. "I'd have ye know that Captain Aloysius O'Rourke is not one who may be offered money like a common Cit. Were it not that I know ye mean kindly, I'd run ye through for offering it. 'Tis a way I have, and I'm loth to depart from it."

I was quick to sue for pardon, alleging that I only made the offer as a loan from one soldier of fortune to another, and vowed that he wronged me in supposing it to be anything else. He was somewhat mollified by this assurance, and eventually agreed to accept five guineas, the amount to be punctually repaid as soon as he should leave the prison. Even then he would not consent to

accept it until I had received his bond in writing, which, with much difficulty in the matter of pens and paper, was at length accomplished.

"And now that we have settled our business, let me beg that you will do me the honour of drinking a bottle of wine with me," he said, his eyes glistening with expectation. "Poor stuff though it is, it might be worse; and, since we can not get better, we must fain make shift with what we can procure."

Upon my consenting to crack a bottle with him, we repaired to the gate, whence, after some bribing and a vast expenditure of patience, he returned, carrying a bottle of wine, a couple of glasses, and some food. Seated together on a bench in the corner of the yard, we dined, on my side at least, with an appetite that at any other time I should not have believed possible under the circumstances. We toasted each other, and by the time the bottle was empty and another had been laid beside it, I was familiar with a considerable portion of my companion's most curious life and history. He was the descendant, as he was careful to point out to me, of one of the first kings of Ireland, marking back his line direct to no less a person

than Brian Boru. Thus he claimed for himself an ancestry which, he remarked, with a wave of his arm, was without its equal in the history of mankind. As a matter of fact, I discovered later that his father was an Irish soldier of fortune, of dissipated habits, but of unqualified bravery, while his mother was none other than Kitty O'Shane, at one time a popular actress and a lady of some parts. From the one he had inherited his enormous stature, also his love of roaming and fighting, from the other his unconscious dramatic instinct and the sweetness of his voice. His mother dying of a fever when he was thirteen years of age, and his father marrying again within a month of her decease, he found himself thrown upon the world to sink or swim at an age when most boys are occupied with their Horn Book.

As so many homeless lads have done before him, he first bestowed his patronage upon the sea, with the result that he received more kicks than halfpence from the tarpaulins, his masters; and, after enduring it for four years, found himself in London, a deserter from his ship, and with every prospect of starvation in the near future. His life for the three years next ensuing was, for a man

like himself, who had roamed so far, strangely uneventful. Later, however, he tired of respectability and joined the forces of Marlborough. The three Great Powers having declared war upon the French, he was ordered to the Low Countries, was present at the siege of Bonn, and won a commission for himself by a deed of the greatest daring at Blenheim. After Malplaquet he would seem to have tired of war and to have returned with his master to England, where he joined a party of merchant adventurers and set sail for Hindustan. The glories of his life in that enchanted land he never wearied of describing. The blood stirred in my veins as I listened to the tales he had to tell of beautiful begums and ranees, of mysterious palaces, and treasure chambers such as made my mouth water and my fingers itch to turn the key of them. The fellow had the true gift of narration, and could make me see the scenes he depicted as vividly as if I had been present with him at the time when they occurred. 'Twas an experience such as I had never had before, and I sat entranced, hanging on his words, long after our fellow prisoners had sought their couches for the night. How little did I dream then of the

effect his words were to have upon my after life.

"I have been thinking," said the Captain, when he rose to imitate the rogues' example, "that it would be as well that you should sleep 'twixt myself and the wall to-night. Remember that you have the guineas upon you, and these spawn would think no more of splitting your weasand to get at them than I should knocking the neck off this bottle."

I was of the same way of thinking myself, and as I had not the least desire to lose either my money or my life, I gladly agreed to follow his advice. Accordingly, when we entered the room, I drew the wretched pallet, which had been thrown in for my accommodation, into the corner, and, shielded by the Captain's enormous bulk, laid myself down to rest with as much security as I was able to derive from his proximity. Seeing that I had not rested on the previous night, I had scarcely closed my eyes before I was asleep. The respect which the Captain inspired in our fellow prisoners must certainly have been considerable, for, however gladly they would have compassed my death in order to obtain the money in my fob, under his care I was not once troubled with their attentions. I

can recall now that I dreamed I was in Hindustan, and that a princess, so lovely that there was not her equal upon earth, sought my hand in marriage. I thought of Cicely, and was about to tell her that I already loved elsewhere, when she withdrew her veil, and, lo and behold, my visitor was Cicely herself! In the midst of my happiness at seeing her, I awoke to find that it was light and that another miserable day had begun for us. We had scarcely breakfasted, this time on somewhat better fare than had been offered me on the previous morning, than a turnkey entered the yard, and roughly bade me prepare myself to pay a visit to Mr. Bambridge. Hearing this, my heart sank in my breast. Remembering the threats he had made use of on the night of my arrival, I had the best of reasons for dreading my second interview with him.

"Hark 'ee, Sir Charles," said the Captain, drawing me a little to one side, "'twould be better not to let Bambridge suspect the presence of those guineas. Should you do so, you may make up your mind to never seeing them again."

'Twas good advice, so, unperceived by the turnkey, who was twitting one of the divines

on the shabbiness of his raiment, and bidding him purchase another gown, lest by chance he should suddenly be called upon to preach before the King, I slipped the coins from my fob, and handed them to my friend. Then, telling the man I was at his service, I followed him across the yard, through our lodging-house, and out by the door by which I had first entered the room. I found Bambridge in the main hall of the prison, interrogating a miserable wretch who had that moment been brought in. The fear he was inspiring by his menaces was amply sufficient to cause dismay in the heart of one whose turn had still to come.

"Prate not to me of wife and children!" he cried, shaking his fist in the debtor's face; "what have they to do with me? There are my just and legal fees to be paid. If not, then may the devil take me if I don't screw it out of you somehow!"

Summoning one of his myrmidons, he bade the fellow take the poor wretch away and iron him heavily.

"And now, my dear Sir Charles," he said, turning to me with a bow and an expression of mock servility upon his face, "I trust you will pardon my not having paid my respects

to you sooner. I have the excuse, however, that my time has been somewhat occupied. I trust your lodging is comfortable, and that the living meets with your satisfaction? Should you have aught to complain of in the purity of the water, or the condition of the bread, you have only to do so to have it remedied."

He waited for me to speak, but I said nothing. The fellow had me in his power, and I was not prepared to bandy words with him.

"You have no complaints? 'Tis good. And now to a more sordid matter. As you are doubtless aware, there are certain fees which as yet have not been paid. They amount to the sum of eighty guineas."

"Eighty guineas!" I cried in amazement. "Why, man, the night before last you said 'twas only sixty!"

"Exactly—the night before last," he answered with a malicious grin. "'Tis eighty now, and to-morrow 'twill be a hundred. Let me assure you, in all seriousness, Sir Charles, that it will be as well for you to find the money somewhere, and with as much despatch as possible. Your own creditors are not my concern; my fees are. I may tell you,

therefore, once and for all, that there are other and more uncomfortable quarters than those in which you are at present domiciled. 'Twould be a pity if so pretty a gentleman should be called upon to occupy them. I will give you forty-eight hours in which to find the money. If it is not forthcoming then, I fear I shall have to put you to some little inconvenience. Bear that in mind."

On my way back to my lodgings I reflected that I was indeed in sorry plight. I knew no one to whom I might apply—that is, with any hope of success—and yet, to save myself further torture, it was necessary that the money should be forthcoming within the time specified.

On my entering the yard, the Captain hastened toward me with a beaming countenance.

"We meet again," he cried, pressing my hand. "I had my fears lest that villain, Bambridge, might wreak his vengeance on you as I have seen him do on others."

I furnished him with a faithful description of all that had transpired at our meeting, and of the threats Bambridge had used toward me.

"'Tis most unfortunate, for I have the

best of reasons for knowing that the knave will keep them," he said when I had finished. "Have you no friend to whom you can apply for assistance?"

I considered for a few moments, but could think of no one.

"No person in power who could bring influence to bear upon Bambridge?"

I mentioned the name of Sir Robert Walpole. It was strange that I had not thought of him before.

He brought his hand down upon his knees with a sounding smack.

"You could find no one better," he said. "A letter must be despatched to him at once."

The necessary materials were quickly obtained, and, assisted by the Captain, I was soon hard at work composing my letter to Sir Robert. 'Twas a poor performance at best, and it hurt my pride to have to write it almost as much as Bambridge's tortures could have done. I reminded him of his long-standing friendship for my family, told him of the cruelties to which I was to be subjected, and implored him to bring his influence to bear upon my hard-hearted gaoler.

When it was written I despatched it, and

then sat down to await an answer with what patience I could command. That Sir Robert would do much to help me I had not the least doubt, but what course he would adopt I had no sort of idea. As a matter of caution I had refused to give any gratuity to the messenger until he should return with an answer, and in so doing I felt that I possessed a guarantee against his treachery.

Slowly the day wore on, mid-day passed, and still the messenger did not return. What was keeping him I could not think, but one thing at least was certain, and that was the fact that my spirits were sinking lower and lower with every hour I waited. It was during this miserable period, when time hung so heavily upon my hands, that the Captain, for so I must for the future call him, proved himself an invaluable companion. His happy-go-lucky Irish temperament rose superior to the reverses of Fortune, and though occasionally he would be cast down, the next moment would find him thumping himself upon the chest, as I have already described, giving orders that there should be no repining in the camp, and quite himself once more.

"I see how 'tis," he said at length, when my spirits had sunk to such a level that it

seemed impossible they could ever reach their old pitch again; "'tis the lack of exercise has brought you to this pass. It must be remedied."

With that he retreated into the room that led from the yard, to return presently with a pair of ash plants, each some three feet or so in length.

"Sir Charles Verrinder's skill with the rapier is as well known as Temple Bar," he was good enough to say. "I, myself, have some small knowledge of the weapon, so, if these staves are not too clumsy for your handling, what objection have you to a trial of skill?"

Being prepared for anything that would serve to distract my thoughts from my miserable fortunes, I consented with alacrity, and we accordingly took up our positions.

I have already stated that the Captain was infinitely more agile than his bulk would have led one to suppose. More than this, he was, as I was soon to discover, a supreme master of the noblest art known to man. It is true his attacks may have been a trifle lacking in caution, but there could be no other opinion as to his skill save that it was perfection. Hitherto I had been conceited enough

to imagine myself a more than usually able exponent of the science; now, however, I found that I had to deal with a man who was my match a dozen times over. When I had been killed outright three times, I saluted him with a deference I should not have shown to any other man. His face beamed with pleasure.

"'Tis a noble art," he said, "and I would that an occasion might arise in which we could use our blades in common."

Thus encouraged, I revealed to him the fact of my quarrel with Halliday. It caused him the liveliest satisfaction. 'Twas an affair after his own heart, he declared, and if only we could get out of prison together, and I would so far honour him, he vowed he would support me on the field of battle. Indeed, I fancy that the mere thought of our being at the moment unable to oblige the Cit caused him more concern than the prospect of my own trouble with Bambridge on the morrow.

"In an affair of honour," he remarked, "not to be in the way to receive the cartel when it arrives is as great a discourtesy as to fail to answer to it when received."

He was about to favour me with a narra-

tion of certain events in his own career, which bore more or less directly upon the subject at issue, when I espied the figure of my messenger at the gate. I hastened toward him, only to receive the direful intelligence that Sir Robert Walpole was absent from London, and that the date of his return was quite unknown.

"There is nothing for it now," I said to the Captain, who received the news with his usual sympathy, "but to comport myself under Bambridge's tyranny with as brave a front as I can muster."

"Heart up!" cried the Captain, patting me upon the back; "'tis when things look their worst that they begin to mend."

The advice was sound enough, but 'twas somewhat more difficult to put into practice. When, next morning, I was bidden to Bambridge's presence, I am willing to confess that the coolness I appeared to possess was more assumed than real. I held out my hand to the Captain, who took it and squeezed it in his giant's grasp.

"Farewell," I said, "for it is likely that we shall be parted in the future. Happen what may, I shall not forget your kindness to me."

"Keep a good heart, lad," he answered. "Show a brave front, as becomes a man."

And so we parted.

"Now," said I to the turnkey, "lead the way. I am at Mr. Bambridge's service."

CHAPTER III

On reaching the hall in which Bambridge had interrogated me on the previous occasion of my seeing him, I was surprised at not finding him there to receive me.

"Be pleased to step this way, Sir Charles," said the turnkey, with more respect in his voice than he had, up to that time, shown to me.

As he spoke, he led the way down another passage toward a door, which, having reached it, he threw open. I entered, to find myself standing in Bambridge's own private apartment. 'Twas a miserable place at best, and filled with relics of the man's infamous employment. But it was not the room, nor was it Bambridge himself, who attracted my attention, but a man who stood a few paces from him. This individual was none other than my worthy old lawyer, Mr. Joshua Pennyfeather, with whom I had had many dealings, as had my father before me. In point of fact, 'twas he who handed me the

last sum of money he had been able to raise on the mortgaging of my estates, when he presumed to address to me certain words of reproof and counsel as to my actions in the future. In return I had bade him hold his tongue, and had given him my assurance that the only advice I required from him was that with which his legal training could furnish me, and for which I might rest assured I should have to pay heavily for later on. My surprise, therefore, at seeing him now, in Bambridge's presence in the Fleet Prison, I must leave you to imagine. Yet somehow, the sight of that old fellow's rugged countenance affected me strangely, recalling, as it did, happier and brighter days. Nor was the rascal himself less affected; indeed, I could have sworn that a tear stood in his eye, though 'tis possible it might have been caused by the snuff which he was busily engaged in taking.

On my entering the room, Bambridge stepped forward to greet me. There was the same evil look upon his face that I remembered on the previous occasion, but this time it was kept within bounds by a pretence of politeness which by no means deceived me.

"Mr. Pennyfeather, how comes it that

you are here?" I began, advancing toward the old man, a gleam of hope shining into my heart. "What does your presence mean?"

"It means, Sir Charles, that I have news for you, which, at this unfortunate crisis in your career, it is scarcely necessary to say will in all likelihood be welcome to you. May I hope that Mr. Bambridge will permit us an opportunity of conversing together alone for a few moments, after which, the monies which are detaining you here can be paid and you will be free."

Bambridge, who protested that nothing would please him better than to serve Sir Charles Verrinder in any way within his power, departed from the room, leaving us alone together.

"And now, Mr. Pennyfeather, what have you to tell me?" I inquired. "It is needless for me to assure you that any hope you can hold out of effecting my release from this place will be most welcome to me."

"No one grieves more than I do that you should be here at all," the old fellow replied. "'Tis no part of my business, however, to blame. What I have to do is to bring you tidings that will, I hope, extricate you from your unfortunate position."

"I should be better pleased if you would come to the point without further delay," I said impatiently; for the fellow spoke slowly and cautiously, as if every word he uttered had a monetary value, and would have to be accounted for in his bill of costs later.

"It is possible that you may remember that Sir Peter Verrinder, your grandfather, now unhappily deceased, was the elder of a family of four. His brother William, as you are aware, met his death in the hunting field; his youngest sister died unmarried; while the elder, Caroline, gave her hand in marriage to Sir Gregory Sumpter, Baronet, of Sumpter Hall, in the county of Oxfordshire. The issue of that marriage was one son."

"I remember the son," I answered; "a rustic bumpkin who could talk of nothing but horses and hounds, who as often as not carried a ferret in his pocket, and who went to bed in his boots six nights out of the seven. A pretty fellow, truly!"

"You will say so when you have heard everything," the lawyer continued drily. "Now, as you are aware, the present baronet has been an orphan these three years, and now has himself met his end at the early

age of twenty-five from the very cause to which you allude."

Here, indeed, was news that was likely to cause a change in the aspect of my affairs.

"And what does it mean for me?" I cried. "Proceed with your story. How am I affected by his death?"

"It affects you inasmuch that you are now sole possessor of what remains of the estates," he answered.

"Of what remains?" I repeated. "What mean you by that? Has he squandered his patrimony like the rest of us?"

"The estate was certainly much involved," the lawyer replied, "but 'tis quite certain that you will receive a sum amounting to close upon ten thousand pounds, which I trust will prove sufficient to release you from this place and to set you on your feet once more."

"'Twill certainly do that," I answered; "but when 'tis done there will be scarcely enough left to purchase a rope with which I may hang myself. However, let us be thankful for small mercies—to get out of here is something."

"Perhaps by judicious management and careful living, accompanied by a determination to amend——"

"Careful living, judicious management, and a determination to amend are virtues I fear I do not possess," said I. "My good friend, you have me in your power, and, if a homily I must receive, I pray you let it be a short one. This waiting is not at all to my taste. The sooner I have washed off the stains of this prison and made a change in my attire, the better I shall be pleased."

"In that case, the homily I had prepared for you shall wait," answered the old man, with one of his nutcracker smiles. "And now for Master Bambridge and his accounts. The rogue shall have his just deserts, and no more."

"Bravo, old watchdog!" said I, slapping him upon the back. "But, hark ye, Mr. Pennyfeather, there is one other thing I must say before we are disturbed. If I am to be liberated, there is a worthy gentleman, my companion in the prison, who must be set free also. He has proved himself a good friend to me."

The old lawyer looked concerned on hearing this.

"Like your father, like your father," he muttered, shaking his head, "who would take everybody else's debts upon his shoulders

while his own remain unpaid. And how much may it require to set this new-found friend upon his feet?"

"A matter of fifty pounds," I answered; "and when you see him you will say 'tis a small sum to release so big a man. But bear this always in mind, 'tis a loan to be repaid as soon as possible. If you say otherwise, there will be such a commotion as you will never be able to allay."

"I will bear it in mind," returned the lawyer, but with no great show of graciousness. "And now to your own business; the other we can attend to later."

With that he departed in search of Bambridge, returning with the rascal at his heels a few moments later. Then my affairs were gone into, and over the matter of the fees a battle royal ensued. 'Twas one matter, Bambridge found, to have to deal with me, but quite another to have to fight so keen a lawyer as Mr. Pennyfeather. In the end he consented to take fifty pounds, with the amount of Kerdoff's debt, and to grant me my release. That settled, I demanded the release also of the worthy Captain Aloysius O'Rourke, my fellow prisoner. This also having been arranged, a turnkey was despatched for the gen-

tleman himself. Pennyfeather's eyes opened wide when the messenger returned, bringing the Captain with him. Hitherto the lawyer had bestowed but scant attention upon my story of the gentleman; now, however, that he had him in the flesh before him, his feelings underwent a change. He stared at him open-mouthed, as if he had never before seen, as was probably the case, and never expected again to see, such a marvel of a man.

"Mr. Pennyfeather," I said, "permit me to make you acquainted with the worthy Captain O'Rourke, a gentleman who has proved himself my very good friend since my committal to the Fleet."

The Captain, who had not the least notion of what had transpired between us, bowed ceremoniously to the lawyer, who returned his salute with equal care.

"Mr. Pennyfeather, your obliged and humble servant," he said.

"Captain O'Rourke, yours most politely," answered the lawyer. After which a short pause ensued.

"Sir," Mr. Pennyfeather continued, after a moment's hesitation, "I have a few words to say in your private ear, if you will so far honour me."

The Captain immediately stepped with him to one side, where a short conversation took place. I watched them anxiously, knowing how inflammable was the Captain's temper, and how like it was the lawyer would offend his sensibilities. That the former was, as the sailors say, on the wrong tack, I was soon convinced. This suspicion became a certainty when the latter burst forth with:

"I thank ye kindly for your good intentions, my man, but 'tis useless to say more. The O'Rourkes accept gifts of money from no man, kings and princes and Great Moguls always excepted."

At this juncture I deemed it necessary to intervene, and did so, explaining that the matter of the money was only a loan to be repaid at his convenience. At this he calmed down somewhat, very much, as you may suppose, to the lawyer's relief, who had begun to look upon himself as a lost man. Then, turning to me, the Captain seized my hand, and said in his broad Irish, with tears running down his cheeks—

"Me bhoy! me generous bhoy! I'll take from ye what I'd take from no other man living. Bedad! I'll not be me father's son if *I ever* forget the benefit ye've done me this

day." Then turning to Mr. Pennyfeather, he continued, " Mr. Lawyer, I spoke roughly to ye a minute ago, and I entreat your pardon."

Thereupon he blew his nose furiously, using a very dirty kerchief, helped himself to a prodigious pinch of the lawyer's snuff, smote his chest lustily, and vowed that we were all, Bambridge excepted, princes of good fellows, and that for the future " *there should be no repining in the camp.*"

Ten minutes later, the formalities of the law having been complied with, we left the prison, and, making our way into the Fleet Market, called a coach. In it we took our places, Pennyfeather and I on one seat, the Captain occupying another, and seeming to fill the entire coach. I was about to order the driver to convey us to my own lodgings, when the lawyer interposed.

" You would scarcely know them for the same place," he said. " Your rogues of servants, believing you to be ruined, departed hastily, taking with them every article of value they could lay their hands on. Your creditors next appeared and seized the furniture, and there is naught else left."

" I might have guessed as much," I answered bitterly. " When the lion falls, the

eagles descend and devour his remains. And pray, since I am homeless, where are we to lodge?"

"If your honours will do me the favour of billeting yourselves upon me until some place more suitable can be found, I protest I shall be vastly pleased," the lawyer replied.

O'Rourke slapped his knee, and said in such a loud voice that the passers-by stared wonderingly into the coach:

"'Tis a prince! a very prince among lawyers!" and thereupon he shook the little man's hand so heartily that I found the latter rubbing and caressing it a quarter of an hour afterward.

At the end of ten or fifteen minutes, we arrived at the lawyer's abode, in the neighbourhood of High Holborn. A meal was already upon the table, and three bottles of wine stood warming beside the hearth. The Captain licked his lips, and, from the manner in which his eyes glistened, I conjectured that 'twould have needed but small encouragement for him to have shaken the lawyer by the hand again. This, however, he mercifully forbore to do.

"Many a time, in the days that are gone, did your father crack a bottle with me in this

room," said the little man, when he had bade Mistress Bridget, his housekeeper, place the meat upon the table. "By your leave, we will take a snack now, and afterward pay attention to more urgent matters. Take your places, gentlemen, and let us fall to."

This we did, with a will on my part that was the outcome of two days' partial starvation. The lawyer's wine was of the first quality, and 'twas not until we had sent the three bottles, and another couple to follow them, to the right about that we cried enough. After that, by an appointment which the little man had thoughtfully made, Snipps, the tailor, made his appearance, and the choosing of stuffs was entered upon. This important business being at an end, we allowed the man to depart, having first bound him to his promise that the garments should be delivered with all despatch possible. That being accomplished, we deliberated as to our own movements, and decided to remain hid until we were attired in a manner befitting our rank. In the meantime the lawyer had retired to his business, leaving us alone together.

In order not to dwell too long on such minor incidents, let it be sufficient to say that we adhered to our decision, and did not stir

abroad until our new apparel came to hand. Then, so far as one of us at least was concerned, 'twas a glorious sight that burst upon the world. Gone was the Captain's threadbare suit, and in exchange he was attired with a grandeur it would be difficult to describe. No butterfly could have been gayer, no peacock that ever walked a lawn more satisfied with his appearance. The better to carry it off, he assumed a manner, a mixture of haughtiness and geniality most comical and yet wonderful to behold. At times, however, some circumstance would arise to touch the feelings that lay hid beneath the surface, and, like a spark to gunpowder, he would burst forth in an explosion, throw his dignity to the wind, and be his old, blustering warm-hearted self once more. For the lawyer, he declared, he had come to have an enormous liking, and 'twas strange to see how well so ill-assorted a pair agreed together.

"You have a singular character, Sir Charles, in your friend," the old man would say. "A singular character indeed. Better fitted to a camp of exercise than to the life of a humble citizen like myself."

Then the other side of the question would come to light.

"'Tis a queer old parchment-worm, that lawyer man," The O'Rourke would say. "A heart of gold. And, stap my vitals, but I'd pink the man who said different."

And now to return to another matter. Though I have not, for some time past, referred to Cicely, it must not be supposed that I had no thoughts of her. On the contrary, her pale, sweet face was always with me like the ghost of a happiness long past. To have won her would have been Paradise itself. Oh, why, I asked myself again and again, had not my inheritance been larger? Then all might have been well.

On the morning following my release, the lawyer and I sat down to a serious consideration of my affairs. Drawing pen and paper to him, he set on one side the amount of my liabilities, and the amount of my cousin's estate that would come to me upon the other. Calculating the amount spent in effecting the release of the Captain, and a further loan to that gentleman, whose purse stood in need of replenishment, it was found that a balance remained of two thousand three hundred pounds sixteen shillings and one penny. A pleasant sum, as doubtless 'twill be agreed, for a young man to possess, but scarce sufficient

to allow a hope that I should figure as a dangerous rival to that monster Halliday. Be that as it may, however, I was determined to see Cicely as soon as might be, in order to plead with her once more. I confided my intention to the Captain, who congratulated me upon the decision I had arrived at, and himself offered to assist me to the best of his abilities.

"'Tis true," he said, "that hitherto Mars has been my god rather than Eros, but there have been certain hearts I have carried by storm, and with the general business of such affairs I am fairly familiar. In short, if 'tis Cupid you want, he is here and ready to do your bidding."

I could scarcely refrain from smiling as I contemplated the picture of the Blind Bow Boy, weighing twenty stone, and of such gigantic proportions. Fearful of offending him, however, I dissembled as best I could, at the same time declining his offer with every show of courtesy. Then, donning my hat, I left the house on an attempt to waylay Cicely in the park, and, if not there, at one of her other favourite resorts.

The morning was bright and warm, and, as I made my way along the streets, attired

once more as befitted a gentleman, I could not refrain from contrasting my present position with that I had occupied only a few days before. I had tasted the bitterness of adversity and had no desire to do so again.

On reaching the Mall I looked about me in the hope of discovering her of whom I was in search. Half the town seemed to be present there, but no sign of Cicely. I was conscious, however, of a certain curious look upon the faces of my acquaintances when they regarded me. It was, for all the world, as if I had returned from the dead, and they were surprised at seeing me. It was only when, half an hour later, I chanced to come upon Tom Skevingdale in the ring that I learned the reason of it all.

"Lud, man," cried he, "what's the meaning of your presence here? 'Twas rumoured that you were safely under lock and key, and that we were never to see you more."

"If folk believe everything they are told, they must be prepared for deception," I answered, speaking as I did in the hope of putting him off the scent. "'Tis a censorious world, and there are folk in it who can never be happy themselves unless they are doing that which will make others miserable."

"Egad, and you're very right," said Tom cheerfully. "As a case in point, only the other night some lying knave spread a report about the town that I had won ten thousand guineas at bassett. Next morning every Jew was clamouring for his money, and would not be persuaded that the rumour was false. If I were to win five thousand now, I should be ruined forever."

"And since the world is so uncharitable, what else has it to say of me?" I inquired, for, as I had good reason to know, Tom himself was one of the most arrant gossips in the town.

"Oh, there are worlds of tales afloat," he answered, offering me his snuff. "'Tis said that you were turned out of old Castlefield's house on the night of her Grace of Hampshire's Rout, after Halliday had broken your nose, and that, so far as Lady Cicely was concerned, you had agreed to cry *peccavi*."

This was more than I could bear.

"'Tis a lie," I cried, "a base and scandalous lie. And if I could find the man who said it, I would lay my cane about his shoulders and stick him afterward. Dost know the man, Tom?"

"Nay," said Tom, shaking his head,

" there is no author will put his name to these things. But, if 'tis any consolation, Charles, you may know that I denied it on thy behalf."

I despaired altogether on hearing this, for I knew that Tom's denials were often as bad as other folk's inventions, and did quite as much mischief. Leaving him, I made my way into the park, where I had the good fortune to see Cicely herself in the act of alighting from her chair. With my heart beating like a farmer's flail, I went forward to meet her, wondering what sort of reception she would accord me. 'Twas as I expected. On seeing me her face became deadly pale, and she made as if she would draw away from me.

" Cicely," said I, " can you find it in your heart to treat me thus? Will you cast me off without a word? "

" Sir," she answered, as if she were speaking to a stranger, " I must ask you to withdraw. After all that has passed, your presence is an offence to me."

Motioning her chairman away with a wave of my hand, I drew still nearer to her. Almost unconsciously we moved down a by-path.

" Lady Cicely," I said in a low voice, " 'tis always a dangerous action to goad a desperate

man. And I will pledge you my word that, so far as you are concerned, I am desperate. A base and unwarrantable lie has been circulated through the town by my enemies. That lie has come to your ears, and I ask leave to defend myself. It is said that I have resigned all pretensions to your hand. You have heard this story?"

"I *have* heard it," she answered coldly, white even to her lips.

"And is it possible, knowing what you do of me, that you can believe it?"

She hesitated before she replied, and that little pause was like a death-stab to my heart.

"What can I say?" she asked, as if she were bewildered and looked for my advice. "It was told me by one who was present and heard you say it. Otherwise I should not have believed it."

"That man is a liar, whoever he is, and if you will but give me his name, I will ram the lie down his throat for the perjured villain he is. 'Twas Halliday, I suppose, who told you? I can guess as much."

Though she did not confess it, I could see that my random shot had hit the mark.

"I was right," I said. "'Tis well. Mr. Halliday and I have an account to settle to-

gether already. This adds to it. 'Twould be the right thing for me to shame him publicly, and if he is in the ring, as I live I will do it."

"Nay, nay, for my sake, I implore you!" she cried.

"You would try to shield him?" I said. "Oh, Cicely, is this the end of all your protestations? Is this the outcome of the vows we swore together? Only a month since you told me that you were mine—that nothing, not even Death itself, should come between us. Now I am thrown aside like a worn-out glove, and the love, which once was mine, has been purchased by a Cit with nothing to recommend him but his guineas."

"It is not true," she answered. "You of all men should know me better than that."

"You mean that you do not love Halliday?" I cried, clutching like a drowning man at the frail straw of hope she threw to me. "Then, if that is so, you can not have ceased to love me. Tell me that, and I breathe again. Say I am still the man you love, and all shall yet be well."

A faint flush overspread her face, and then she turned away from me.

"It is cruel of you to treat me thus," she faltered, "as cruel as it is useless."

"Since you admit that you still love me, I will not believe that it is useless," I cried. "While you are free, there is still time for us to outwit them. They have told you that I am ruined, that I have not one guinea to rub against another. But it is false. They do not know that I have lately succeeded to an estate in Oxfordshire."

"Succeeded to an estate?" she cried, eagerly searching my face with her beautiful eyes. "Why did you not tell me this before?"

Never until that moment did the possession of money seem so desirable. Yet, when all was said and done, what remained to me was so small that I knew it could make no difference. I told her how the case stood, and her face fell.

"My father would never consent," she said at last.

"Then why not fly with me, Cicely?" I asked. "I am not as I was the other night. I am free of all my difficulties; no man has the right to lay a finger on me. With the little that remains and an office from Walpole, we should do well. And, Cicely, if we had nought else, we should still possess each other."

Once more she shook her head. Tears stood in her eyes as she replied, as she had done before, that whatever she might wish, it was impossible.

"I am the most unhappy girl in England, I think," she cried bitterly. "I can do nothing—nothing."

I did not then know the whole truth. I have learnt it since, and a blackguard tale it makes.

Halliday, so it would appear, had advanced money to my lord, sums far above the other's ability to pay. In consideration of his receiving the hand of the other's daughter in marriage, he had consented to wipe out the loan. Speaking plainly to the girl herself, he had shown her how matters stood, and had threatened that, in the event of her not becoming his wife, he would commit her father to the very prison from which I had so recently been liberated. What choice, therefore, had my poor love but to break her troth with me, or to send her aged father to his doom? These things, as I have said, I discovered later. At the time, however, her behaviour, naturally, puzzled me, while it cut me to the quick. That Cicely, the gentlest of women, should so suddenly have discarded a man whom she had

always professed to love, was a thing that, for the life of me, I could not understand.

"If 'tis as hopeless as you say," I continued, looking her in the face, and speaking very slowly, "may I entreat one last favour at your ladyship's hand?"

She winced as if I had struck her; then tried to appear brave.

"Tell me the favour," she answered, "and, if it is in my power, I will grant it for old sake's sake."

"'Tis that you will permit me to walk with you through the park and down the Mall. If you will do this I will promise to refrain from molesting you in the future."

"Let us walk, then," she replied, and so we returned to the main path, and, side by side, conversing as we went, and pretending a cheerfulness that was assumed to mask our breaking hearts, made our way through the crowd of acquaintances, and so reached the Mall. That our companionship caused the town an overwhelming surprise, there could be no sort of doubt. The nudging and whispering that went on, on either side, was sufficient evidence of this fact. They had believed me discarded by Cicely, yet here I was, apparently on the best of terms with her. Ru-

mour had declared me ruined and in the Fleet, yet here I was, elegantly attired, in the park. It was small wonder that they stared and looked uneasy when I fixed my glance upon them. Had I been so minded, I could have picked a dozen quarrels in half as many minutes, and for every one have sent a man post-haste to his grave. I had no thought of such a thing, however. The man with whom I had to deal was Mr. Halliday, and it was my intention to do so without loss of time. When we reached the end of the Mall, where her chair stood waiting for her, I turned and bowed to Cicely.

"Your ladyship has done me too much honour," I said. Then, when I had handed her into her chair, I bade her farewell. There was a despairing look in her beautiful eyes as she answered me, and her lips moved, though her voice was quite inaudible. Then her men took up their poles and bore her off. When she had gone I happened to look at my feet, and there, lying in the mud, just as she had dropped it, was a tiny kerchief. Whether it had fallen by accident or design I could not say, but, however it may have got there, I picked it up and placed it in my pocket.

"'Tis all that remains of a life's love," I

said to myself as I did so, and, like the fool I was, I added, in my wrath, "and all that remains of my belief in woman."

Then, with my heart filled with rage, I strode off in the direction of Mr. Pennyfeather's house, to discover the Captain and the lawyer hobnobbing together in the parlour. Their glasses were charged, and four empty bottles lay upon the floor. The little lawyer was three parts drunk, but as yet The O'Rourke was only half warm. When I entered the room, he was trolling forth what he called an Indian love-song, in a voice that would have earned him a fortune had he cared to employ it upon the stage. I noticed that the lawyer looked away from me as if he were ashamed of his position; his companion, on the other hand, seemed hugely delighted at my appearance.

"'Tis a generous wine," he cried, holding his glass aloft in order to admire the colour. "A wine fit for a king. Get upon thy pins, my lawyer, and I'll give thee a toast such as shall set the warm blood coursing in your veins, and make you young again."

Pennyfeather endeavoured to protest, but the look he saw in the Captain's eye induced

him suddenly to change his mind; so, with a groan, he filled his glass again.

"Let us drink to the health of Sir Charles Verrinder and the Lady Cicely Helderston," cried the other, glass in hand, "and confusion to their enemies."

If the amount of confusion in which my foes were to be placed might be measured by the confusion the lawyer put into the repetition of the toast, they were certainly destined to be heartily confounded. His tongue refused to perform its office, his eyes were glassy and thick, while his words, when he *did* speak, were scarcely distinguishable. 'Twas a sorry picture for a man usually so staid.

"Oh, why," he said to me pathetically later on, "did you bring that man to my house? His discourse is diverting, but he has made me drunk. Moreover, he has been to the kitchen, where he cooked himself a mess he calls a curry. Do you wonder that my maids, who are not used to such behaviour, are almost beside themselves with fear? The neighbours will certainly indict me for a nuisance."

On the other hand, the Captain's good opinion of the lawyer advanced by leaps and bounds. Of his singing he confessed he had the very poorest opinion, but for what he

called the man's moral worth he had nothing but praise. But to return to my story.

Having given and drunk the toast already proposed, he sang once more, throwing the window wide open before doing so. Pennyfeather in despair dropped his head upon the table, in which attitude he presently fell fast asleep. Feeling that he had suffered enough, I approached the Captain and stated that I should be glad if he would comport himself more gravely for a time and give me his advice.

"All I have is yours," he answered generously, "as they say in the East, 'even unto half of my kingdom.' Now I come to think of it you look downcast. Let me pour you out a bumper, 'twill put fresh heart into you."

I shook my head.

"Well, well, perhaps you are right," he said. "Speak on, my friend, and tell me everything. What success had you this morning? Could you not find her, that you look so downcast?"

"Ay," said I, "I found her right enough. But little joy resulted from the finding."

I then proceeded to show him how the case stood, laying particular stress on Halliday's treachery, and the lie he had spread con-

cerning me. As I progressed he rose from his seat and paced the room, adjuring me one moment to keep up my heart and on no account to forget the thrust he had shown me in the Fleet, and next treating Halliday to a hurricane of abuse and imprecation. There could be no doubt, he said, but that we must fight, and he would go out with me. It was, as he declared, a quarrel after his own heart, and he was prepared to relieve me of the entire conduct of the affair.

"'Tis a gentlemanly business," he cried, "and I would that I were a principal in it. But there," he added, "it is just possible there may be someone present who will oblige me?"

After further discussion he donned his hat, and having ascertained the address of Halliday's house, set off in search of him. In something less than two hours he returned, filled with delight at the success which had attended his embassy.

"'Tis as neatly done as a man could wish," he said, throwing himself into a chair—the only one in the room that could contain his bulk. "The meeting will take place at daybreak to-morrow morning in the park, and no one will be present save the principals and their seconds."

He thereupon proceeded to favour me with a variety of instructions, accompanied by vigorous action and demonstrations which could scarcely have been conducive to the peace of mind of those in the room below.

Later in the evening I retired to my chamber in order that I might write a letter which was to be delivered to Cicely in the event of the combat, so far as I was concerned, proving fatal. In it I repeated the story of my love, bade her pay no heed to what ill-natured folk might say of me, but implored her always to believe that I remained till death her honest and devoted lover. As further proof, if more were needed, I induced the old lawyer, who by this time had regained his senses, to draw up a will for me, by which instrument the greater portion of my fortune, in case of my death, would pass to her, and to her alone. To this I set my signature, the Captain appending his as witness, not, however, without venting his wrath upon me for what he was pleased to call my folly in believing that a man would ever come to harm who had had the advantage of his tuition. This done, I retired to rest, and slept without waking until it was time for me to rise and dress for the encounter.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN the Captain woke me it was quite light, though the sun had as yet not risen. To my surprise the man was already dressed and, as I soon discovered, in the best of humours, not only with himself but also with the world in general. As he assisted me with my toilet he hummed snatches of songs and bade me keep up a stout heart, for it was certain, for reasons elsewhere specified, that no ill could possibly befall me. On my own side I could not help wondering how Halliday was feeling, and, strangely enough, I discovered that, mixed with my anger, I entertained a certain measure of sympathy for the Cit who had set his heart upon making Cicely his wife; for was I not about to take that opportunity from him? However, I was none the less resolved to punish him for his treachery, and, had I then known what I know now, 'tis my belief I should have been even more determined upon killing him than I was then. I was not so wise, however, and many years

were to elapse before I was to become better informed upon the subject. But all that will come in its proper place, for rest assured I have a strange and wonderful tale to tell, of which my quarrel with Halliday is only the meanest part.

But let us hark back to the place where I left off in order to moralize, and let me say that, before setting out, I was ordered to partake of a hearty breakfast, washed down by a fixed allowance of old October, which, it appeared, the Captain had been at some pains to procure for me.

"'Tis the finest drink in the world," said he; "it warms and comforts the stomach; makes the eye sure and the wrist firm. Gives a feeling of resolution, yet does not heat the blood. There are those, it is true, who swear by Burgundy; less experienced others say Hollands; but, for my part, give me good October, with the virtue in it—'tis worth a thousand foreign messes."

Having finished our meal, we set off in the direction of the park. As all the world knows, 'tis a favoured spot for such encounters, and some there are who will have no other. The dew sparkled upon the grass like diamonds, and, indeed, what with one thing

and the other, 'twas as pretty a sight as a man could wish to see. It was plain that we were the first on the ground, and for this, you may be sure, the Captain exacted his meed of praise.

"To haste to the *rendezvous*," said he, "is to arrive with a beating heart and a dazed eye, and, in other words, to render but a poor account of one's self. Many a good man has gone to his death by being too late upon the field."

While he had been speaking, two figures were to be observed approaching from the direction of the town, and, as they drew nearer, it was seen that they were Mr. Halliday and Sir Giles Webster. The latter was a man deeply in Mr. Halliday's debt, and, therefore, was the more ready to oblige in all that was asked of him. We saluted each other with the ceremony customary to such affairs, and then handed our swords to be measured and examined by the seconds. Mine was a new weapon, purchased on the previous day, and had the terrible disadvantage of being as yet unused to my hand. Had it been my old blade, with whose weight and balance I was as familiar as with my walking cane, I should have felt more confident; but that good

friend was, in all probability, by this time in the hands of some rascally Jew, having been stolen and disposed of by one of my lackeys during my incarceration in the Fleet. At a signal from the Captain I threw off my cloak and coat, placed my hat upon them, and then rolled my sleeves above the elbow. Halliday imitated my example, and then we took up our positions, sword in hand.

I have not the least intention of describing in detail what followed. The record of such an encounter would be as tedious for you to read as it would be for me to chronicle. It only remains to say that we were thrice parted by our seconds, and that in the fourth round I passed my opponent's guard and ran him through as neatly as I had made up my mind to do. 'Tis only fair, however, that I should give the Cit his due, and say that he stood up against me better than I had expected him to do; but, to be honest, I will confess that I felt no remorse when I saw him lying upon the ground before me, the life-blood streaming out and staining the delicate cambric of his shirt. He had come between myself and the woman I loved, and now he had paid the penalty for his interference.

Having wiped my rapier clean, and saluted

Sir Giles, O'Rourke and I withdrew, promising to despatch the first man we met in search of a surgeon.

"Do you think he will die?" I asked of my companion as we left the park and retraced our steps toward our abode.

"I would stake my last guinea on it," answered the Captain readily. "'Twas a clean thrust, and took him in the right place. Mr. Halliday will do you no more mischief, or I'm a poor judge of wounds."

By seven o'clock, when Moll, the maid, was trundling her mop upon the steps, and Doll, the dairy wench, was crying her wares in the street below, we reached home to find the lawyer much concerned as to our absence.

"'Twill bring a hornet's nest about your ears," he said, when he heard the news we had to tell. "Halliday has many men in his power, and it is even said that the King himself is indebted to him in vast sums, which will have to be repaid if the man is dead. They will wreak their vengeance on you, and, in my thinking, 'twould be as well to lie by until the storm has passed."

"Wouldst have us not fight, then, Master Lawyer, because of the consequences?" asked the Captain, puffing his cheeks and swelling

and bridling like a turkey cock. "That is a thing I can not believe."

"Nay, nay," answered the peaceable little man, "you misunderstand my meaning. 'Tis not that I would not have you fight, but that I would not have you suffer from the effect of that fighting—a very different conclusion. I have seen so many of these little affairs end disastrously for the parties engaged that I am concerned for your welfare. Your new-found liberty would be of small use to you if you have escaped the Fleet only to fall into Newgate."

"There is something in what our friend says," said the Captain, after a while, as if he had been thinking the matter over. "Newgate is indeed a scurvy place for a man of action. To my thinking, we were better in France, or, better still, in Hindustan."

The word Hindustan recalled the tales he had told me in the Fleet, and for a moment I stood entranced by the ideas that came into my mind. Having killed Halliday, and Cicely being altogether lost to me, as I had every reason to suppose, why should I not throw in my lot with O'Rourke, and set sail with him for that mysterious land? I said as much, whereupon the Captain fell upon me and em-

braced me in his enthusiasm, declaring that a notion so fine had surely never entered a man's head before, and wound up by saying that, in return, he would pour into my lap such wealth as a man never dreamed of before. Pennyfeather, on the other hand, listened aghast to the proposal. For a man to say in his sober senses that he would cross the seas and visit Hindustan — a country populated by wild beasts, and men who were half beasts and half human—was to confess himself a fit subject for the madhouse. That I, Charles Verrinder, could be guilty of such a thing he declared he could and would not believe. Finding that I was in earnest, he implored me in the name of my family, in the name of the father whom he had served so long and faithfully, not to attempt it, and when I declared it was my intention to adhere to my resolution, he came near to breaking down altogether. A life of adventure was what I had always craved for, and now it looked as if I were about to have my wishes gratified.

Then, the first heat of the resolve being passed, we sat down to discuss the various ways and means. These settled, all that remained was to discover a ship bound for the Indies, to fit ourselves out with what we

should require during the voyage, and then to take our places on board her and set sail.

"Had I ever thought I should have seen this day, I would rather have left you in the Fleet," cried Pennyfeather, wagging his head. "You would have been safer there, and at least away from this talk of going into the world."

"And what do you know of the world, old mole," cried the Captain, slapping him upon the back. "What know you of the great world, you, who have spent your days among parchments and dry-as-dust deeds? What know you of the open seas? What tales have the stars told you, when you have lain encamped on the great plains? Have you heard the sighing of the wind in the jungle grass, and the cry of the night bird from across the still lagoon? When you have carved out a way for yourself where white man has never been before, making yourself a king, who, in this old England, art but a nobody, then can you prate of your knowledge of the world. But not till then."

Not while I had known the Captain had I seen him so grand as he appeared at that moment. His figure swelled to twice the size, his eyes shone like coals of fire, and his voice

trembled beneath the weight of his emotion. Here indeed was a leader to be followed. It seemed as if I had known him all my life, and yet, in reality, 'twas scarce a week since he had first greeted me in the prison yard. But I was to know him, and to appreciate his many sterling qualities more fully in days to come. As it was, for the rest of the day we talked of Hindustan, and of the life that lay before us there, with the result that when I went to bed that night it was not to dream of Halliday, stretched out upon the ground, but of palaces and temples, of treasure chambers, and all the glories of those unknown cities.

Next morning, as usual, the Captain was early astir. 'Twas his business, he said, to find out when the next ship would sail for the Indies, and what her quality and accommodation might be. This he did, and to such good purpose that when he returned toward evening he brought with him the information that a vessel would leave London in three days' time, and that for an agreed sum she would land us safely at Fort William, which as all the world knows, though I did not then, is one of our possessions in the Provinces of Bengal.

This arrangement was so exactly suited to my companion's mind, that he was trans-

ported to the seventh heaven; vowed that the captain commanding the vessel was a prince of good fellows, while the ship herself was second to none, and the soundest upon the ocean. The former he desired me to meet and make acquaintance with without delay; the latter, he informed me, lay in the river, and was of fully three hundred tons' burden. The next day I was accordingly marched off into the City in order that I might become familiar with the man who for so many months was to have the handling of my destiny. We discovered him at the " Jolly Mariners," a tavern of much repute among sailors, and situated in the vicinity of London Bridge. Here they meet and discuss their calling, talking of things which, to the ordinary mind, had no significance. We discovered Captain Selkirk, seated with several brother seamen, in a rearward room overlooking the river. 'Twould have been a man altogether lacking in knowledge of this world who would have been unable to put a name upon his calling as soon as he set eyes on him. The stormy winds and salt seas had tanned his cheeks the colour of mahogany; his hands were knotted and gnarled like the boles of an old oak tree, and when he spoke it was with a low growl that

bore a resemblance to the snarling of an angry sea. Yet with it all the man was the possessor of an equable temper, was a good mariner, respectful to his superiors, civil, as far as was consistent with his duty, to those under him, and though boasting a strong liking for rum, which, it would appear, is the favourite beverage of sailors, was a sober-minded man in every respect. Me he received with courtesy, The O'Rourke with enthusiasm. In order that our acquaintance, to use his own expression, might start with a fair wind, he called for a bowl of punch, and when it arrived we sat down to it. By the time it was finished and another had been ordered we had made good headway, and I had learnt much of the route we were to follow, was familiar with the dread the Captain entertained for certain portions of the ocean, namely the Doldrums in the North, and of the stormy winds in the South, that seem ever to blow round that Cape to which mariners have given the pleasant name of Good Hope. So much to my taste did the company and conversation prove, that it required but small persuasion on their part to induce me to remain and sup with them; the Captain appearing hugely delighted at the progress I was making in Selkirk's intimacy.

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The meal in question was long drawn out, and for this reason darkness had fallen before we left the house. In the best of humours we bade the captains adieu, and proceeded on our return journey to the lawyer's abode. In something less than half an hour we reached it, to find the little man anxiously awaiting our coming. There was a look upon his face which told me that something was amiss.

"You have not arrived a moment too soon," he cried, on seeing us. "Indeed, I am not altogether certain that it would not have been better if you had not come at all."

"Why, how now?" I answered. "And what's this? Am I to be lodged in the Fleet again, or what means it?"

"'Tis worse than the Fleet, I fear," he replied, wagging his head. "It looks like Newgate, that is, if all I hear be true."

I stared at him in amazement.

"Newgate!" I echoed, placing a grimmer emphasis upon the word than I was altogether aware.

"Newgate!" cried the Captain, also with what was plainly a touch of alarm. "What makes you say Newgate, Master Lawyer?"

"Halliday is dead," the other replied solemnly. "Did I not tell you I feared trouble

would come of it? His Majesty has ordered your arrest on a charge of murder. 'Tis a nasty business, and for the reason that the man has promised money to many influential people, who will now get nothing. You may be very sure that vengeance will not lag very far behind."

The Captain and I stared at each other in consternation. Our affairs had indeed come to a pretty pass.

"And what is to be done?" I asked at length, for I was not at all disposed to allow myself to fall into the hands of the enemy. "How are we to get out of this difficulty?"

"I see nothing for it but for you to lie hidden until an opportunity shows itself, and then leave England as soon as possible," said the lawyer.

"Mr. Pennyfeather speaks the best of sense," returned the Captain, stroking his chin; "'tis not like an O'Rourke to hide, but 'tis very plain that, if we are caught, and King and country are against us, Tyburn will be our destination. For myself, I prefer the good ship Pride of London and the Indies. What say you?"

"With all my heart!" I answered. "I've

seen Newgate and I've seen hangings, and I can safely say I like neither."

"But how came you to hear of all this, friend Pennyfeather?" inquired The O'Rourke, taking a huge pinch of snuff, and looking at the old lawyer with his head on one side as he did so.

"Seeing that two Bow Street runners have been watching this house all the afternoon, and that another has made inquiries as to your whereabouts this evening, 'tis likely that I should know something about it," the other replied. "If I'm not mistaken, they are watching the house now, and are only waiting their opportunity to effect your capture."

This was unpleasant enough, but, as we were soon to discover, there was worse to follow. He had scarcely finished speaking before a loud knocking sounded at the front door. I am not aware how the others felt, but I know that for my own part my heart jumped into my mouth at the first rat-tat.

"There is no saying who it may be," cried Pennyfeather. "Upstairs with you as fast as you can go, while I descend and open the door. "I'll give you all the time I can, but 'twill not do to keep them waiting."

On hearing this the Captain rose in his majesty.

"Run!" he cried, bringing his fist down on the table with a crash that made the glasses rattle and the dishes leap, "The O'Rourkes run from no man. Let them come and take me if they are able. I've done naught I'm ashamed of, and whatever I *have* done I'll do again, King George or no King George!"

"Man, are you mad that you talk like this?" whispered Pennyfeather in horrified tones. "What can you do against so many? Fight as you will, they will capture you in the end. No, sir, were you as brave as a lion, or as strong as Samson, this time you have no option but to hide. If you will not think of yourself, think of Sir Charles here. Every moment you waste in argument now is tightening the rope around his neck; though it ill becomes me to remind you of it, he did you a good service lately. Would you repay it therefore by hanging him?"

The old fellow could not have brought forward a better argument, or one that was more likely to achieve its purpose. The Captain was another man immediately. He grasped my hand.

"Do with me as you will," he said. "I

fear, however, that a body like mine was never made for hiding."

At that moment another storm of knocking resounded on the door. Before it had ceased we were half-way up the next flight of stairs, while the lawyer was descending to unbar the door. Fortunately, we had brought our hats and cloaks with us, and had also our swords at our sides. From the landing above we heard the lawyer draw the bolts and ask what reason occasioned such a battering on the door of a respectable citizen. A man's voice answered, demanding admission in the King's name, and stating also that he knew the birds were there, and that he would find them if he had to pull down the place to do so.

"May the devil fly away with Halliday!" whispered the Captain to me as he peered over the banisters. "If he'd known the parry to that thrust we shouldn't have been in this position. Now where are we to hide? You can't put me behind a curtain or on a shelf in the linen closet. I must have room if I am to remain undiscovered."

The same fact had struck me long since. The man was built on so large a scale that no cupboard could have contained his bulk, nor could he have crawled beneath a bed with-

out lifting it a foot into the air. Then a happy idea occurred to him, and his face lit up with a smile.

"Yes, I think it will do," he said to himself, and forthwith conducted me to the door of a room at the end of the passage, which was occupied by Mrs. Bridget, the lawyer's sedate housekeeper, a lady of some sixty years and circumspect behaviour. Roused by the noise downstairs, she had lighted a rushlight, and was now sitting up in bed with a very scared face. On seeing the Captain enter, followed by myself, she was about to utter a loud scream, and would have done so, but my companion made such a menacing gesture that she stopped with her mouth wide open, and uttered never a sound.

"As you love your life, madam, be silent," he whispered. "I give you my word that not a hair of your head shall be harmed so long as you play fair by us. The Bow Street runners are after us; they are downstairs, and we must find a hiding-place in this room. Sir Charles, you had better climb up and stretch yourself upon the tester of the bed. If you keep still, they'll not think of looking for you there. As for me, when the proper time arrives, I've a trick ready to my hand.

You, madam, had better pretend to be asleep when they come in, and when you wake rate them properly for disturbing you. Be careful, however, that you don't overdo it. Too much acting is as dangerous as too little. Now, Sir Charles, up you go."

Without waiting to be bidden twice I set foot upon the bed, and little by little drew myself up to the tester. There was just sufficient room for me to lie flat between it and the ceiling, and as it was constructed entirely of wood, and very solid, it could scarcely fail to bear my weight. Meanwhile the Captain had blown out the rushlight and softly lifted the window. Then ensued a period of waiting, during which I could hear the beating of my heart upon the wooden slats of the tester like a carpenter's hammer. If they entered the room it seemed as if they could scarcely fail to hear it.

After we had waited ten minutes or so, we heard the sound of footsteps on the stairs, and presently the lawyer's voice protesting that it was useless their disturbing his household in this idle fashion.

"We are best judges of whether 'tis idle or not, old gentleman," returned another voice. "The men are in this house we know, and it's useless for you to say they are not. It's our

duty to find them, and our duty we are going to do. Let me tell you, if you don't know it already, that to hinder a King's servant is a punishable offence. You remain on the stairs, Barnabas, and you Dick, Tony, and Paul come with me."

We heard them pass along the corridor in the opposite direction, then followed the sound of furniture being hastily moved. All this time the Captain had been standing by the window, the outline of his great figure just discernible against the faint moonlight outside.

"Well, I suppose it's about time for me to take my departure," he whispered, when a few minutes had elapsed. "Don't move, Charles, whatever you do. As for you, madam, just fall asleep as quickly as you can, and keep your own counsel when you wake, or you may take my word your safety will have vanished forever and a day."

With this threat he squeezed himself through the window, shutting it quietly after him. Then he disappeared, I know not where, while a snore from the bed below was sufficient evidence that Mrs. Bridget was profiting by the plain-spoken advice she had received. A moment later the sound of heavy footsteps were to be heard returning along

the corridor. Then followed Pennyfeather's voice, protesting against the men entering the chamber.

"'Tis occupied by Mistress Bridget, my housekeeper," he said. "Surely no need exists for searching there."

"There and everywhere else," the man replied in a surly tone. "Bring the lantern this way, Tony, and let us look under madam's nightcap. A nightcap sometimes makes a good disguise."

With that he opened the door and entered the room, followed by his men. Still Mistress Bridget slept peacefully.

"Come, come, madam, let us have a peep at your pretty face," said the man in command, and I could tell from the movement of the bed that he was shaking the woman by the shoulder. A moment later a succession of shrill screams told us that the lady was awake, and not only awake but prepared to do battle in the defence of her privacy.

"Men! men!" she cried, as if they were some sort of wild beasts, "what do you here? Are you thieves that you enter a lone woman's sleeping chamber at this hour of the night? Where is my master? Is he a man that he allows his women to be treated thus?"

"I am here, Mistress Bridget," piped the lawyer from outside. "Believe me, they will not harm you. All they desire is to make sure that Sir Charles Verrinder and Captain O'Rourke are not concealed in your room. Prithee, Bridget, have patience."

"Patience?" she cried; "'tis more than patience that is required to put up with these knaves. I'll not do it; I'll leave the house. I'll get up and go this instant. Do you call yourself men to treat a helpless woman in this fashion? Oh, you unmannerly fellows! you wicked rascals! Is this the reward of twenty years of honest service?—Fie upon you, sir, fie upon you to allow it! If you had the spirit of a man you'd seize these villains and throw them down the stairs."

Desperate as my condition was, I could not refrain from smiling as I pictured the little lawyer performing such an act of valour. There was not one of the runners who couldn't have picked him up and thrown him over his head had he been so minded. Seeing that safety lay in silence the lawyer did not reply; meanwhile the men, under the guidance of their leader, set to work and busily overhauled the room, not ceasing until they had examined every part of it, accompanied all

the time by a torrent of invective from the bed. The tester being so near the ceiling, and the approach to it so difficult, it did not strike them to look up there, so that at last the search was ended, and they were compelled to admit themselves beaten.

"It's all right, now, granny," said the leader of the party reassuringly; "you can go to sleep again. 'Tis plain the men we want are not here. We will look elsewhere, for that they are in the house I know. Pleasant dreams to you, old girl, and may your temper be less shrewish in the morning!"

With that they departed to search elsewhere, and I drew a long breath of relief. Provided they didn't return, we were saved. A minute later, the window was very softly pushed open, and the Captain's head and shoulders appeared outside. With an effort and the sound of much heavy breathing, he struggled in through the small space at his command, and when he had reached the floor stepped softly across the room and drew the bolt.

"Saved," he whispered, "but 'twas a close thing. I couldn't have held on much longer."

I looked over the tester, and asked him where he had been hidden.

"I have been holding on by my hands to the sill outside," he answered. "Dangling in mid-air with a fifty-foot drop under me. 'Tis a good thing 'twas the back of the house, otherwise I must assuredly have been seen. Now, I fancy, thanks to Mistress Bridget, who played her part to perfection, we are safe, at any rate, for the time being."

By this time she had got her head under the clothes and was snivelling audibly. Overhead we could hear the tramp of the enemy, who were searching the garrets in the hope of discovering us. Ten minutes or so later, they came tramping down stairs again, the light of their lanterns shining through the chinks of the door and vanishing again as they descended to the living-room once more. It has struck me that Pennyfeather must have been as surprised as they were at our extraordinary disappearance.

"What is to be done next?" I inquired, when we had given them some ten or twelve minutes' grace. "We can't remain here forever."

"The only thing is to get on to the roof, and, having done so, to make our way along the houses until we can get down at the other end of the street; after that we must proceed

to the river, seek out the Pride of London, and lie hidden aboard her till she sails."

This was not a very cheerful prospect, but, so far as we could see, 'twas all that was left to us, and beggars can't be choosers.

"But how are we to get on the roof?" I inquired, for it seemed to me by no means an easy undertaking.

"I confess I don't see how it is to be done," said O'Rourke. "Done, however, it must be, that is, if we desire to escape. When you are ready we had best set off."

"I am ready now," I answered.

"In that case, descend," he said, "but be careful. Remember that any suspicious noise will be sufficient to bring them upstairs again like hounds upon a trail."

Bearing this in mind, I slowly and cautiously clambered down from the tester, and presently stood beside the Captain on the floor. Then, when I had placed some guineas on the table as a token of our gratitude to Mistress Bridget for the help she had rendered us, we softly drew the bolt and stepped into the corridor outside. The noise made by the men, who were searching the lower regions of the house, could be distinctly heard, a fact we did not altogether regret, seeing that their

attention was thereby distracted from our movements upstairs.

"This way," whispered the Captain, and then, beckoning me to follow him, he proceeded to climb the narrow staircase leading to the garrets. Having reached the top we discovered three doors before us, two of which were closed; a third, however, stood open, and the moonlight streaming in through the window showed us that this was a chamber in which the lawyer stored such papers as he no longer required in his office below. Like the room occupied by Mistress Bridget on the lower floor, it was situated at the back of the house, and possessed, outside the window, a narrow ledge for carrying off the rain-water from the roof.

"The very thing," said the Captain, when he had examined it. "This will serve our purpose to perfection."

So saying, he opened the window and prepared to crawl through it. When he was once outside, I handed him his cloak and sword, with my own, and made ready to follow his example. As I found, it was more difficult to accomplish than it looked, for the ledge was narrow, and there was no part of the window on which a firm hold could be taken. A

false step, as I was painfully aware, would mean instant destruction on the stones of the yard below. However, at last we stood side by side, and the Captain gave the order to proceed. At that moment a clock in the neighbourhood struck midnight, and it was the first time in my life that I heard it from such a place. The rest was comparatively easy. All we had to consider was the fact that it was necessary to preserve our balance on the ledge, and to step carefully in order that we might not arouse suspicions in the minds of the dwellers in the houses over which we were passing. How we were to descend at the other end was a mystery I could not solve. By this time, however, I had become so thoroughly imbued with a belief in the Captain's cleverness that I was prepared to trust everything to him, blindfold. Nor was my trust misplaced.

Reaching the last house in the street, we called a halt, and the Captain looked about him.

"I had hoped to find a roof to which we might have lowered ourselves," he said in a low voice. "Such an one, however, does not seem to exist. That being so, 'twill be necessary for me to alter my plans somewhat."

With that he crept to a window, similar to that by means of which we had reached the roof, and tried the fastenings. 'Twas a leaden casement, with the usual small diamond panes. Inserting the point of his rapier in the crevice, and pressing upward, he lifted the latch. A moment later the window stood open and we were at liberty to enter.

"You are surely not going to make your way through the house?" I whispered, amazed at his hardihood.

"'Tis exactly what I am about to do," he answered coolly enough, "and, egad, it seems our only way of escaping from the trap we're in. Remove your shoes as soon as you are inside, and step warily. The least mistake now may prove fatal to the enterprise."

So saying, he entered the room, and as soon as he was safely on the floor, I followed. Then, having removed our shoes, we stepped across the floor, and, still advancing with the same caution, made our way down the attic stairs till we reached the floor below. 'Twas a desperate business, and, from the first, I carried my heart in my mouth. Happily, however, we were as fortunate as we were daring, for the owner of the house was entertaining his friends that evening, and, to judge from

the noise that issued from the room in which they supped, 'twas a merry party that sat at table. Under cover of their mirth we reached the hall, passed through a pantry, and then, unlocking a door, out into the garden beyond. To scale a low wall on the further side was a matter of small difficulty, and then we set off at our best pace for the river and the Pride of London.

CHAPTER V

I HAVE already told you how we effected our escape from Mr. Pennyfeather's house by climbing to the roof and descending to the earth again, and this through the residence of an entire stranger. The credit of this masterly achievement belongs entirely to the Captain, whose fertile brain originated it, and whose readiness of resource enabled us to carry it out successfully. But, though we had passed so safely through the gentleman's house at the end of the street, under cover of the noise made by him and his guests over their wine, our troubles, as we soon discovered, were by no means at an end. We had scaled the wall at the further end of the garden, and were safely in the street on the other side, when the following conversation took place.

"Now that we are out of that scrape," said the Captain, "what we have to set our minds upon doing is to reach the good ship Pride of London, and stow ourselves safely

away on board her before they can discover us."

Ever since we had descended from the roof the moon had been hidden by a cloud; now she had withdrawn herself and was shining full and fair upon the city once more.

"In which direction does the river lie?" I asked, for, at the moment, I was so confused that I was scarcely conscious where we stood.

"The river lies to our right," the Captain replied. "It's unfortunate, as things are, that it should be so, for we shall be compelled, in order to reach her, to pass the end of the street. As, however, they are in all probability still watching the lawyer's house, there should not be much chance of our being discovered. You had better go first, and I will follow some fifty paces behind. Two men hurrying like this would be likely to arouse suspicion."

I complied with his order and set off at a brisk pace down the street, crossing to the other side at the point where the two thoroughfares met. A man was standing on the further side, near the house through which we had so lately passed, but his presence caused me no uneasiness, and, with scarcely a glance at him, I continued my walk as be-

fore. Ten seconds had not elapsed, however, and the Captain could scarcely have been abreast of him, before, with a loud shout, he raised the hue and cry, and hastened after us across the road. Almost before I knew what was happening, the Captain was beside me.

"Run, lad, run for your life!" he cried. "They are after us. If we're not round the corner at once we're lost."

Thereupon we set off, and I, for one, ran as I had never run in my life before.

"The fellow who gave the alarm has a long start of the others," remarked my companion, when we had been running for some minutes. "His friends are a full street behind him, and, egad! I am very much minded to teach him a lesson. We have plenty of time at our disposal, and it may serve to put the others off the scent. When you reach the next turning, stand in, and lie close against the wall."

Before you could have counted twelve I had done as he ordered me, and was crouching in the shadow with the Captain beside me. The man had seen us turn into the alleyway, and, believing that we had gone on, had followed at full speed. No sooner had he turned the corner, however, than the Captain

sprang upon him and seized him in his arms. I had had one opportunity of witnessing his marvellous strength in the Fleet Prison, and another when he had hung for more than five minutes suspended by his hands on the window-sill outside Mistress Bridget's room in Pennyfeather's house. Neither of these exhibitions, however, compared in any way with what I saw now. The man who had been pursuing us was a big fellow, heavy, and very powerfully built. In The O'Rourke's hands, however, he was a mere toy, a very shuttlecock. Picking him up, he tossed him from him as easily as a child would throw away a worn-out plaything. The man uttered a little cry as his head struck the opposite wall, then fell and lay huddled up in a heap upon the ground, unconscious.

"He'll tell no more tales for a time," the Captain remarked coolly, as he surveyed him. "If I had the opportunity, I'd serve that Head Runner the same way. 'Twould teach him a lesson."

At the same moment, a window in the house beside which we were standing was opened, and a man, nightcap on head, looked out.

"What's this?" he cried; and then, lift-

ing up his voice, he began to shout, "Murder, murder, watch, watch!" as if his intentions were to rouse the whole neighbourhood as soon as possible.

"We must get out of this without delay," whispered The O'Rourke. "If we don't, we shall be captured, and that before very long."

The man above was still bellowing "Murder" as if for his life, and, in consequence, windows were being thrown up in all directions. We had delayed too long already, and the noise made by our pursuers could be distinctly heard. Indeed, they were so close that, if it were our intention to pass out into the street again, they could scarcely fail to see us and run us down.

"'Tis likely there's a passage at the further end of this alley that will take us out," said the Captain. "If not, well then, we must scale the wall and trust to luck."

With a swift glance at the man lying on the ground, and another behind us, we took to our heels once more and ran down the alley, only to discover, much to our satisfaction, that the Captain was right in his surmise, and that there did exist another passage, communicating with a street, at the further end.

"Luck is favouring us," cried The O'Rourke, as we followed it along. "I'm afraid, however, that that crowing cock at the window will put them on our track as they pass."

A few moments later a fresh burst of noise from our rear warned us that this was indeed the case, and it struck me, in consequence, that our chance of escape was growing every moment more and more remote. The Captain, however, was one who would never say die, and he pointed out to me as we ran that, if we could only manage to hold out for a little longer, we should, in all probability, be able to give them the slip, for good and all, in that tangled network of streets and buildings fronting the river. Whether or not we should be able to get so far, however, was the question. With the best intentions in the world a man can not run forever, and already I was beginning to find my strength failing me. My breath came in short, thick gasps, and a cold sweat was breaking out upon my brow. Yet all the time the noise behind us dinned louder in our ears.

"I can run no further," I said at last, staggering to the nearest wall and supporting myself against it. "Go on."

The Captain said never a word in reply. Stooping, he picked me up in his arms and continued the flight as easily as if I had been a little child. His strength, indeed, seemed inexhaustible, for, weighty load though I must have proved, his pace was scarcely diminished. We were now somewhere in the vicinity of the Fleet Market, a place unsavoury from many points of view. The stalls still stood as in the day time, while in every available corner were to be seen the forms of outcast men and women—Newgate birds and Bridewell lasses who were without other homes to go to. Some lifted their heads and just looked up as we passed them by; one, more courageous than the rest, rose and made as if he would bar our passage, but, seeing with whom he had to deal, thought better of it and laid himself down again. Suddenly, from the further side of the market, came much shouting and singing, and presently we saw, advancing toward us, a party of young men, fashionably attired, but all more or less under the influence of liquor. According to the custom of the time, they had been spending the evening within the rules of the Fleet, making merry with the men imprisoned there. Now they were on their way home, ready for

any mischief that might happen to present itself.

"If you think you can get forward on your own feet for a while," said the Captain, putting me down, "our chance of stopping those behind us is a good one. These young bloods will serve our purpose as well as, if not better than, anything else."

With that he stopped and bowed politely to the young men, who, as you may suppose, stood amazed at his height and bulk.

"Gentlemen," said he, "I have small time to spare for conversation. Nevertheless, I will offer you an explanation. My friend and I are being pursued by Bow Street runners, for what, I can assure you, is no fault of our own. If you will listen for a moment you will hear them. They are close behind. 'Twould be a friendly act on your part could you delay them sufficiently long to permit of our getting away altogether. Use no violence toward them, I beg of you, for they are the king's servants; but keep their attention occupied for ten minutes or so, and then all will be well."

"'Fore Gad! that we will," cried one of the youngsters.

The rest took up the tale, and then we,

thanking them for the kindness they were rendering us, passed on again as fast as we could run. At the moment that we left the market on the other side, we heard the two parties come into collision with much shouting and laughter on one side and, I have no doubt, curses on the other.

"Now, turn to your right," cried the Captain, who was well nigh as fresh as when he had started, "then to your left, and after that to the right again. That should bring us to the river side, where we must endeavour to find a boat to take us to the Pride of London. 'Tis to be hoped the tide is in."

I followed his directions, and, after what seemed an eternity of running, we reached the river bank. High warehouses towered above us on either hand, throwing long shadows across the river. We searched the wharf up and down, but no boat could we discover.

"We must find one somewhere," said the Captain; "if not, we shall be caught like rats in a trap."

We, accordingly, left that particular wharf and proceeded in search of another further down stream, only to achieve a like result. By this time we were close against London Bridge, and could plainly discern the shipping

lying in the stream upon the other side. Once on board the Pride of London, and we knew that Captain Selkirk would be able to hide us somewhere until the vessel sailed.

The difficulty, however, was to get a boat that would take us to her.

"If we can't find one, bedad, there'll be nothing for it but for us to swim," said the Captain, who was not to be deterred by trifles. "'Twill not be the first time I've had to take to the water to avoid capture."

I was compelled to protest that, so far as I was concerned, the case was hopeless, for the simple reason that I could not swim. The only reply to my speech was a scornful grunt, which might have meant anything or nothing. It could not be said that we were idle or half-hearted. We scoured wharf after wharf in the hope of finding what we wanted, but always with the same result; not a boat was to be seen. The position was growing desperate, for we knew not at what moment the enemy might be upon us. There was but one wharf left to try, and we were hastening toward it when we were turned back by a noise in the street ahead of us. A moment's listening was sufficient to show us that we were outwitted. Our pursuers, having made a cast

further along the bank, were harking back in the hope of discovering us. Another party, at the same time, was coming up on our rear. We were therefore between two fires. The Captain, discovering this, stopped and solemnly stroked his chin, a trick he had when thinking deeply.

" Bedad, my dear boy," said he at length, " I'm not one to give in, but it seems to me we are in a very awkward, not to say unpleasant, predicament. We have the enemy in front as well as behind, and, since you can not swim, the river is as bad as a sixty-foot wall to us. The question is, what we are going to do? One thing is certain sure, I have not the least intention of being captured without a struggle, and I'm not going to desert you. Let us look down this street and see whither it will take us."

With that he led me down a long, dark alley-way, which, as I suspected, opened out on to the river at the further end. The night wind blew cold across the water, but it was not the wind that made me shiver so much as the thought of Newgate, whose gates seemed yawning to take me in. With Halliday's death, the king bent on punishing me, Castlefield aiding and abetting him, and a large pro-

portion of the Great World hating me with such a bitter hatred for having destroyed the goose that had laid them so many golden eggs, I knew that, if once I were inside, I should stand but a poor chance of getting out again. For this reason, like The O'Rourke, I was the more resolved not to allow myself to fall into their hands. By this time our pursuers were so close that the noise of their shoes upon the cobble stones could be plainly heard. Some fifty yards out in the stream three small barges were to be seen.

"I wonder if we could reach them?" said the Captain, who had been eyeing them lovingly. "It will mean a ducking, but a ducking is better than hanging. If you are prepared to trust yourself to me, I fancy it can be managed."

"Of course I will trust myself to you," I answered. "Tell me what you want me to do, and I'll do it to the best of my ability."

"The first thing is to get into the water," he replied. "In order to do that we must scramble down the sides, which, mark you, will be as slippery as glass. After that you will have to depend upon me."

It did not strike me to argue the matter with him. Without a second thought I ap-

proached the bank, and, kneeling, took hold of the woodwork and let myself down. The water was very deep at that particular spot, and, before I knew it, I had slipped and was below the surface; when I rose again, the Captain, still as calm as ever, bade me seize his coat collar and warned me on no account to struggle. This was easier said than done, but I am vain enough to imagine that, when once I had seized him, I rendered a fairly good account of myself in the transaction. Then my companion struck out and began to swim in the direction of the group of barges. The water was bitterly cold, and, though the distance was comparatively short, hours seemed to elapse before we reached them. Even then the Captain was not satisfied, but he must needs swim round to the other side. We were only just in time, for, just as he whispered to me to hold on to the gunwhale of the barge he had selected, the figures of our pursuers appeared on the spot we had so lately quitted.

"Keep a tight hold," whispered the Captain, "but on no account allow your head to appear above the gunwale of the boat. You may be sure they are keeping a sharp look out up and down the stream, and if they suspect we are here, it won't be long before they

find a boat and pull out to us; in which case we shall have no option but to let ourselves be captured or drowned."

"I prefer the latter," I answered. "I wish, however, that they'd make haste. The water is freezing the marrow of my bones."

Little as we expected it, we were compelled to remain in our unpleasant position for upward of ten minutes. During that time we listened to the voices on the bank, and prayed that our pursuers would not take it into their heads to search for us upon the stream. Presently the sound of voices ceased and the lights departed, until the clocks in the neighbourhood struck two, and all was silence once more. Just two hours had elapsed since we had clambered out on to the roof and said good-bye to Mr. Pennyfeather's house.

"Now that they are gone," said the Captain, when he had made sure that all was safe, "we must endeavour to climb into the barge without attracting the attention of anyone who may be loitering about on shore."

He was the first to do so, and, as soon as he had embarked, he gave me a hand, in order that I might follow his example. After that, we stretched ourselves on the rough bottom

of the boat and tried to convince ourselves that we were safe. My teeth chattered with the cold, my arms ached almost beyond endurance owing to the strain that had been placed upon them, while my body, from the wrist downward, was numbed by the icy water. However, we had the consolation of knowing that, at least, we had outwitted our foes for the moment, and were at liberty to find what warmth we could in the remembrance.

"How long will it be necessary for us to remain here?" I inquired of my companion at last. "It looks as if we had escaped Newgate only to perish of ague in the arms of Father Thames."

"I am waiting until all is quiet ashore," he answered calmly, taking a peep over the gunwale of the boat as he spoke. "When there is no longer any fear of our attracting attention, we'll cut the rope that binds this barge to the others, and then permit her to drift down stream till she reaches the Pride of London. Then we will transfer ourselves to that vessel, allowing this old tub to continue her voyage to the sea, or to such a place as may seem best to her."

Accordingly, a quarter of an hour or so

later, when the City might have been dead or deserted, for all the sign of human life she showed to us, the Captain went forward and released the bonds that bound the barge to her companions. A moment later she had begun her adventurous voyage down stream, and was drawing nearer and nearer to the bridge. Meanwhile, we lay stretched upon the bottom, in order that our presence on board should attract as little attention as possible.

Closer we came to the bridge, the dark arches of which stood out like black blotches against the moonlit water. A bump from one of the buttresses, followed by another and yet another, as the crazy old boat was carried through the water, reminded us of the risk we were running. Presently, however, we emerged again, and it was necessary that we should think how we might best navigate her toward the Pride of London, which we could just see lying at anchor ahead of us.

"'Tis a dangerous business," said the Captain; "but, dangerous or not, we have no choice but to attempt it. To drift past her, and to be found lower down the river in the possession of this boat, would be fatal to us. There's nothing for it, therefore, but to

take the chance of being seen and to abide the consequences."

Bidding me remain where I was, he picked up one of the heavy sweeps and with great dexterity pointed her head for the vessel we desired to reach. Little by little we drew nearer her, till at last we could have touched her bowsprit with the end of the oar. With almost human cunning, she rounded the head and slipped along the great vessel's side until she was so close that I could catch a rope dangling from her bulwarks. This the Captain bade me cling to with might and main. Then, when he had laid aside his sweep, he came forward to me and took the rope himself.

"Now we must climb aboard her," said he, "but step softly; they have not set an anchor watch, and 'twould be against our interests to rouse the ship at this time of night."

When I had found a place for my foot, I did as he directed, climbed over the high bulwarks, and stood upon the vessel's deck. Almost before I had time to look for him, the Captain had joined me, and the barge, which had stood us in such good stead, was floating away astern on a voyage, the end of which we were never to know.

Beckoning to me to follow him, The O'Rourke led the way along the deck, his shoes squelching water under him as he walked. Having arrived at what looked to me like a small house, with a low door in the centre and a window on either side, he pushed open the former and entered, signing to me to remain where I was. While he was absent, I was permitted sufficient leisure to reflect upon my curious position. Overhead towered the great masts, till they seemed to reach the very moon; an indistinguishable mixture of cordage supported them on either hand, while on the main deck, as I afterward discovered 'twas called, were six small pieces of artillery, a pair of boats, many sails, and the various ropes necessary to their management. Landsman though I was, I was fully able to realize the fact that she was a noble vessel, one of the finest that ploughed the seas, the Captain was wont to declare, and I congratulated myself upon the fact that our journey to the Indies was to be made in her.

Then the Captain appeared and signed to me to follow him.

Leaving the deck, I passed, by means of a small corridor, on either side of which were

sleeping apartments, into a large cabin, which was lit by a swinging lamp. At any other time it would not have appeared to me to be an inviting place, smelling as it did of sour sea-water, and other things, but, wet and cold as I was, its warmth and cheerfulness passed belief. In the centre stood a table, and on either side of it wooden benches, upon one of which sat Captain Selkirk, his nightcap on his head and very lightly clad as to his nether garments. On seeing me, he rose and made his reverence.

"'Tis sorry indeed I am to see you in this plight, Sir Charles," said he. "To come aboard in a barge, wet through to the skin, is a poor welcome to the Pride of London. However, what can't be cured must be endured, as the folk say, and if you will permit me, sir, I will do what I can to relieve your distress."

With that he repaired to his own cabin, whence he returned a few moments later, carrying a bowl of rum and some horn drinking cups in his hands.

"'Twill make you warmer," he said, "when you have tasted this. 'Tis the finest cordial in the world, and 'twill ward off cold or sickness, cure the ague, and bring back a man to

himself when everything else fails, or I'm no sailor man."

He poured out a portion of this valuable elixir for me, another for the Captain, and a third for himself. Nor was he altogether wrong in his assertion. The spirit put new life into me, and, when I had drunk it, I felt the warmth once more returning to my body. After a while he conducted us to his cabin, where we changed our sodden apparel for such articles as he could spare from his own wardrobe. For me it was no very difficult matter to don them; for the Captain, however, it was otherwise. The other's garments sat upon him like those of a schoolboy on a grown man, and so comical was his appearance that I could scarce refrain from laughing in his face. When I reflected, however, on all he had done for me that evening, his goodness of heart, and the courage and ability he had shown, I could have upbraided myself bitterly for my lack of manners.

"And now," said the skipper, when we had returned to the larger cabin and were seated at the table once more, "I must ask you to tell me all that has happened, and how I am to help you. If I am not mistaken there was something said about a duel?"

"'Tis a matter of history," cried The O'Rourke, as if he thought the other to blame for being so ignorant of all that had transpired. "'Twas Sir Charles here, and none other, who pinked Mr. Halliday. That was the beginning of the trouble. The Cit, it would appear, had lent money to the King, and would have lent more, had not Sir Charles run him through—as becomes a gentleman. He is now dead!"

"Dead?" cried the skipper, moving a little uneasily in his seat. "That's bad hearing indeed. A wound more or less in fair fight is nothing; but to be killed, well, to tell the truth, sir, there's something about the word that I don't like. It makes trouble for everybody."

"It has made trouble enough for us," I said gloomily. "There are warrants out against us, and we came within an ace of being caught at Pennyfeather's house to-night. But for the cleverness of the Captain here, I should, by this time, be safe and sound in Newgate, well on the road to the plantations or the gallows."

Once more I noticed that the skipper moved uneasily in his seat. I could see by the expression on his face that he liked the

position he was being placed in less and less every moment. It began to look as if we had brought our pigs to the wrong market after all. Then there was a little silence while Selkirk reflected upon the situation.

"And what am I to do?" he asked at last, looking from one to the other of us and searching our faces with his bloodshot eyes. "You will not be wanting me to act in opposition to the law, I hope. I am only a plain sailor man, and the law——"

"To the devil with the law," cried The O'Rourke, bringing his fist down upon the table with a crash. "Do you think Sir Charles Verrinder here, or your obedient servant, Aloysius O'Rourke, is desirous of having any more to do with it than you are? Dost think we should have run so far and endured so much, had we not been anxious to keep out of its way? What we want of thee, Captain Selkirk, is food, shelter, and, above all, a safe hiding-place. The day after to-morrow at daybreak you put to sea, and we sail with you. What, therefore, is to prevent us from remaining hidden aboard your ship until that happy moment arrives? They will not think of searching for us here, and if by chance they do, there are plenty of places where you can

stow us away. You will run no risks; and bear this in mind always, neither of us will allow himself to be taken, come what may."

The O'Rourke's great face showed through the gloom like that of a giant. 'Twas plain that Selkirk feared him every bit as much as he did the law, and was quite as chary of offending him. In his own heart, I had not the least doubt he was cursing us for having come aboard his ship in such a plight; but if this were so he was careful not to show it. He stipulated, however, in his own defence, that if we stayed aboard we should remain hidden away in our own cabins, and on no account were we to venture on deck until after nightfall. Such confinement was a gloomy prospect to look forward to, but, since in all probability our lives—or, at least, our liberties—depended on it, we felt that we had no course left open to us but to agree. Thereupon we retired to our bunks, as the bed-places on board ship are termed, and almost before we were down, were fast asleep.

It was well nigh mid-day when we awoke, and, since we had rested undisturbed until then, it was only fair to believe that Bow Street was unaware of our hiding-place. During the afternoon the skipper was de-

spatched to the shore, with a note that he was to find means of delivering into Mr. Pennyfeather's hands without any chance of its being waylaid. He was also to purchase certain articles which we should require upon the voyage, and to convey the same aboard without allowing it to be suspected that they were for our use. He departed, and in due course returned, bringing with him the articles necessary to our comfort, and also an assurance from Mr. Pennyfeather that he would himself endeavour to board the ship under cover of darkness. 'Twas well known in the City, said the skipper, that warrants were out for our arrest, and he had heard it remarked that his Majesty the King was much incensed with the authorities for not having brought us to book earlier.

"They had better look sharp about it, if they desire to nab us now," said The O'Rourke, rubbing his great hands together. "Once we put to sea, they will have a long chase before them, if they desire to capture us."

In my own mind, however, I was not so contented. The Pride of London, at that moment, was the largest ship lying in the river, and her destination and early date of

sailing being so well known, it seemed to me scarcely possible that she could escape a searching. By some strange chance, however, this actually did happen, though how the authorities came to overlook such a manifest hiding-place I shall never be able to understand.

That night, a little before ten o'clock, one of the ship's boats, which had been waiting at the stairs opposite which the vessel was lying, drew alongside, and seated in her, beside Captain Selkirk, was the little lawyer himself. Never in bygone days had I thought it possible I should come to entertain such an affection for the man. Then, he had seemed to me to be the embodiment of all that was harsh and respectable; his very name smelt of parchment and sealing-wax, and the only association he had for me was in connection with money borrowed and not repaid, and the gradual loss of estates and what made life worth the living. Now, however, all was different. When he reached the deck, I hastened forward to greet him with an affection I had never before shown to him. That he was touched by it, I could see, though he, himself, would probably have been the last to admit it. Escorted by the two Captains, we made

our way to the cabin, where we prepared to hear the news.

"Oh! Sir Charles, Sir Charles," said the old man, leaning toward me and wagging his head, "to think that I should see a Verrinder in this position! What would your grandfather, Sir Peter, have said had he been here?"

"He would have declared, as I do, that needs must when the devil drives," I answered with a laugh that had something of bitterness in it.

The Captain spread out his chest and slapped it with his hand.

"Come, come," he said. "Let there be no repining in the camp." Then he added impressively, "'Twas as brave a little man as I'd wish to see. I'll honour thee for it all the days of my life."

He held out his hand to the lawyer, who, with a piteous expression upon his face, saw nothing for it but to take it. For a long time after he writhed in anguish, despite the compliment the other had paid him.

"And now to business," I said. "What news have you for us, Mr. Pennyfeather? Is Halliday, the Cit, buried yet?"

"Buried?" cried the lawyer in astonish-

ment. "Why should he be buried when he is not even dead?"

The Captain and I uttered exclamations of surprise. We had so made up our minds that the fellow would not recover from his wound, that anything else seemed impossible. If he were still alive, it looked for all the world as if I had had my trouble in vain. I questioned the lawyer upon the subject, with the result that I elicited the information that Halliday was rapidly recovering, and, what was more, that his marriage to the Lady Cicely Helderston, daughter of the Most Noble the Earl of Castlefield, was to take place immediately on his restoration to health.

While I sat silent, brooding over what I had heard, The O'Rourke's indignation knew no bounds. He felt that the Cit, in daring to live after he had pronounced his wound fatal, had done him an irreparable injury. Indeed, he fumed over the matter as if his own honour had been sullied in the transaction, and, for a moment, it seemed as if it would have required but little persuasion on our part to have induced him to make the matter a personal one. Surely, never in the history of this world, was there so warm-hearted, quarrelsome, forgiving, and vindictive an individ-

ual as the man who prided himself in the name of Aloysius O'Rourke.

Later in the evening, the lawyer handed over to my care the money which it had been agreed I should take with me, the remainder being allowed to remain in his keeping until such a time as I should return to claim it. When midnight had struck, we left the cabin and repaired to the deck to bid our friend farewell. The parting was a sad one, and, whatever harsh names the world may have had, and still has for me (and I will not say that they are undeserved), I am prepared to admit that the tears coursed down my cheeks as I clasped the old fellow's hand and bade him what, I could not help feeling, was farewell forever. I had previously given him a letter which I desired he would take the earliest opportunity of presenting in person to the woman I loved —she who was the main cause of my being where I was at that moment. He was to tell her that I spoke of her to the last, and that my love for her had never wavered. Then, with a last squeeze of the hand, I turned and made my way along the deck toward the forepart of the ship, too much overcome for further speech. When the Captain joined me, he placed a hand upon my shoulder.

"Heart up, my lad, heart up," he said; "'tis a brave new world into which we are venturing, and the time will come when you will return to England a rich man. 'Tis a good old fox, the lawyer, and he has served us well. Some day we will reward him as 'tis fitting. In the meantime, *No repining in the camp!*"

According to arrangement, next morning, as soon as 'twas daylight and the tide served, the good ship Pride of London weighed anchor and started on her long voyage to the Indies. The new life of which I had so often dreamed, but never hoped to know, had commenced. How I should comport myself in my new surroundings was yet to be seen!

CHAPTER VI

CONCERNING the long voyage to the Indies in the good ship Pride of London it is my desire to be allowed to say but little. Were I to chronicle it, the record could only be a dreary one, and I have no desire to weary you while so much still remains to be told. Let it suffice, therefore, that, as soon as we had left the river and were in open water, I discovered the fact which those who have never been on the ocean learn, to their cost, that a voyage is attended at the outset by certain minor inconveniences, which, though they may assume at the time considerable proportions, happily disappear as soon as the sufferer is on his feet once more. For my own part, I fell sick immediately, and, when I reflected on the length of the voyage and considered the measure of my own immediate miseries, I fell to wishing I might die rather than they should be prolonged for any greater period of time. The O'Rourke, however, consoled me with his customary cheerfulness, vowing that rum and

pork was the best cure, and that, as soon as I found my sea legs, I should be as brave a mariner as the best of them; as at the time, however, I lay upon my back overwhelmed with nausea, I could only regard his promise as an extremely idle one. In the end, however, he proved to be right, for by the time we had arrived off the coast of Spain I was as hale and hearty as a man could well hope to be. The voyage itself was, for the most part, barren of excitement; we lay becalmed for a week in the regions of the Equator, when the pitch bubbled in the seams of the deck and the sails hung motionless overhead; indeed, so hot was it that one man was overpowered, went mad, and leapt overboard, to be instantly devoured by the sharks alongside. After we had passed the Cape of Good Hope, and a fit and proper name it is, consider it how a man will, and the Captain had told us that our bowsprit now pointed direct for Hindustan, a great storm sprang up, and for some days it was a matter for wonderment to all concerned that we did not lose our masts and go to the bottom forthwith. This evil, however, we were mercifully spared, and in due course, that is to say, on the twenty-third day of February of the year following our departure from Eng-

land, we dropped anchor off Fort William, or Calcutta, by which name it came afterward to be called. It was a moment long looked forward to, and heartily welcomed when it came. The Captain and I, as soon as occasion permitted, arrayed ourselves in our best and proceeded ashore, in order that we might pay our respects to the Governor, as was only fit and proper. When this was done, and we had accepted an invitation to dine with him that night, we proceeded in search of lodgings, which were readily found for us in the house of one of the Company's Factors, a gentleman of polite address and utmost kindness of manner. To me, the scenes in which I now moved were as delightful as they were novel. After the confinement of shipboard it was like a new world, and my contentment became the greater when I found we were so well received on every hand. To most of the Officers, Factors, and writers of the Worshipful Company of Merchants, trading to the East Indies, the O'Rourke seemed well known. It was also evident, since none dared to contradict or pick a quarrel, that they entertained the greatest possible respect both for himself and his sword. In the Fleet Prison, it may be remembered, he had struck me at my first meet-

ing as being a man of no common order; in Calcutta he was a power that few, if any, even if they did not altogether approve of him, dared resist. To every person of rank and consequence he took care that I should be immediately presented, and from them I received, as I shall presently show, all the courtesies and attention due to my rank, and the fact that I was a stranger in the land.

The population of the settlement, so far as the English folk were concerned, was but small, yet what it lacked in numbers it made up in familiarity of intercourse. 'Twas like a large family settled in a strange place, whose members know that unless each does his utmost for the general welfare, 'twould be impossible for harmony to reign or comfort to exist. It is true that there were quarrels at times, particularly among the younger bloods; such, however, could hardly be avoided; but the general life, as I soon discovered, was pleasant and equable in the extreme. During the voyage we had more leisure upon our hands than we had altogether known what to do with; the Captain therefore, while amusing himself, had benefited me by instructing me in the languages of the country, which, for some time to come at least, was destined to be my home.

The result of his tuition was, indeed, so excellent that, on arrival, I found I was able to make the servants, and such native gentlemen as I was brought in contact with, understand what I desired to say. And with this preamble, I will, by your leave, proceed with my story.

We had been in Fort William scarcely more than a week when the Captain, who had for several days past been occupying himself in a manner I did not understand, informed me that it was necessary, with regard to our future affairs, that he should absent himself from the fort, and proceed on a journey into the interior of the country.

"And before I go," said he, sinking his voice a little so that no one should overhear us, "there is one thing which I would have you bear carefully in mind while I am absent. Pay the greatest attention, I beg of you, to what I am about to say, for it is of the utmost importance that you should clearly understand the situation in which you will be placed. Should you, on rising one morning, discover on your table a little cake of rice, neatly prepared and of a square shape, eat it, and say nothing about it. The night following, place these seeds where you found the cake."

As he said this, he handed me three small seeds of the cardamom tree.

"Place these on your table, and, in all likelihood, on the following morning you will find a message awaiting you. Act upon it; but do nothing without caution. Remember always that you have to deal with a people without their equal for cunning on the face of the earth. Believe nothing unless you see it yourself, and not always when you do that. Trust no man until you have discovered his reasons for being faithful; and, above all, say nothing concerning this or anything else to any of our countrymen in the fort. It may be a difficult hand you will be called upon to play, but I am not afraid that you will fail to acquit yourself well."

This was all very well, but, beyond my instructions, in the event of certain things happening, it told me nothing.

"In the meantime, where are you going?" I inquired, for I felt that if he were likely to run into any danger it was only my right to have a place at his side.

"I have a journey before me," he answered, "which journey will, I hope, establish communications with some old friends. Should I be successful, we will leave this de-

testable place at once, and embark upon the new life, of the charm of which you have never dreamed."

That afternoon he, accordingly, bade me farewell, and set off upon his errand. It is needless for me to say how I missed his companionship, the sight of his great figure moving about the house, and the familiar music of his voice. On returning from his business in the evening, our friend, the factor, seemed surprised at finding him gone.

"Another of his wild-goose chases, I suppose," he said. "The man's never happy unless he's away by himself, prying into some native business that is no concern of his. Did he say how long he expects to be absent?"

"He told me to look for him in a week," I answered; "but from his words I gathered that the matter was uncertain."

"You've no idea what he's doing, I suppose?" asked the factor. "The O'Rourke's ways are invariably a mystery to us, and we are grateful to anyone who can give us a solution of them."

I remembered the Captain's advice, and determined not to be drawn into a discussion concerning his affairs. Accordingly, I re-

marked, as was quite true, that I had no notion of his business, and so changed the conversation by putting some questions to him concerning the treaty then in course of arrangement between the Company and one of the most important native princes. It was an anxious period in the Company's history, and for several reasons: the settlement was just emerging from its inceptive period, and was beginning to assert claims where hitherto it had been content to sue for the right of mere existence. Indeed, no man could refrain from being struck with wonderment at the progress it had made since that day when the Right Worshipful Job Charnock, first Governor, landed upon these inhospitable shores, erected his tents, and unpacked his merchandise.

The dinner that evening was a sumptuous one, and was attended by the Governor and the greater portion of the residents. It certainly would seem as if my fame had preceded me; for, though I could scarcely have deemed such a thing possible, many of those present were familiar with incidents connected with my career. 'Twas whispered that I was on intimate terms with the King and Prince of Wales; that Bolingbroke and I were boon

companions, and, stranger still, that even stern Walpole himself was numbered among the list of my closest friends. Who had spread these rumours abroad I can not say, though, it is true, I have my suspicions. Whoever had done it, however, had failed to add the fact that his most gracious Majesty had issued a warrant for my arrest, that I had been but lately confined in the Fleet Prison for debt, and that not only had my good friend Walpole not answered my appeal for assistance while I lay there, but had kept silence afterward when I was released. I am not going to declare myself, however, so modest as to ask you to believe that the admiration of these men, who had so completely severed themselves from the world of fashion, but who were still so anxious to be informed as to all that went on in it, was distasteful to me. On the contrary, I found it gave a fillip to my vanity, which had always been greater than my common sense. At this point I am tempted to moralize on this curious trait of character in mankind. To do so, however, would be a waste of time, since there is still so much remaining to be told.

That evening, when I returned with my friend to his house and retired to my chamber,

I remembered what the Captain had said to me, and carefully examined my table in order to make sure that there was no cake, such as he had described, upon it. Then, trying not to think of Cicely, who by this time was, in all probability, the wife of my old enemy, Halliday, I laid myself down to rest. As a rule I am a light sleeper, the smallest noise being sufficient to wake me. On this occasion, however, I slept the night through without hearing anything. Immediately 'twas light I examined the table, but it was just as I had left it on the previous night. No cake of any sort was to be seen upon it. Next night, and the night following, were as barren of result. Whoever the messenger might be that the Captain expected, he was plainly in no hurry to make his appearance. At last, however, my expectations were rewarded. On leaving my bed on the fourth morning after the other's departure, to my amazement I found upon the table a little cake made of rice. How it had come there I could not tell, for I had lain awake the greater portion of the night, and felt certain that no one had entered my room. But it was there, sure enough; and now it was my turn to give the answering signal.

On retiring to rest that night I according-

ly placed the cardamom seeds where the rice had been, at the same time resolving to lie awake and see who the messenger was who contrived so cleverly to enter my chamber. Hour after hour I waited with my eyes closed, in order that I might be thought to be asleep, but all the time listening and waiting for the man to make his appearance.

"It's no use," said I to myself when day broke. "Something has frightened him, and he will come another night. 'Tis plain I have kept my vigil in vain."

You may judge, therefore, of my surprise when, on approaching the table a few minutes later, I discovered lying upon it a small piece of paper, such as is used by the writers in the Company's factories, with these words written upon it in very bad penmanship: "The tomb of Wazir Khan ere the sun sets to-day."

That was all. I stood holding it in my hand, looking at it. While it could scarcely have been shorter, it might with considerable advantage have been plainer. Did it mean that I was to give this message to the Captain, should he return? Or was I to visit the tomb of this mysterious Wazir Khan myself before sunset? Eventually, having looked at the

question from every standpoint, I decided to accept the latter version of the two readings as being the correct one. But where was this tomb of Wazir Khan, and how was I to get there? These two points, I felt, had to be settled before I could proceed further in the matter. Now there was a man in the Company's service who had been presented to me as taking a deep interest in the natives, their customs, their history, and, above all, their ancient monuments. Accordingly, I made it my business to seek him out without loss of time. Then, assuming a great interest in the matter that lay so near his heart, I finally asked him whether he had any knowledge of the tomb which purported to be that of a certain Wazir Khan.

"And what sort of a place is it?" I inquired, on his answering in the affirmative, for I was anxious to obtain all the information concerning it that I could bring together.

"Just a tomb of the usual description," he replied. "A square building very much gone to decay, with a large tank of masonry before it, in which water-lilies grow in great profusion. If there is any other information you require concerning the monuments of the neighbourhood, I shall be honoured if you will

favour me with any questions you care to put. Searching out and recording their histories is one of the few pleasures I have in exile. I am at this moment preparing a work upon the subject, on which I am pinning my hopes of obtaining my little share of immortality."

As a matter of fact, the book did see the light some three or four years later. Such faith had the author in it, and so certain was he of the public's favour, that he abandoned his post as a writer to the Company and returned to England, where the book was published, and sold exactly twenty copies. Twelve months later the author died a common debtor in the Fleet Prison, while the publisher declares to this day that the least successful book he has given to the public during his business career was " A Complete History of the Various Ancient Monuments in the Neighbourhood of Calcutta—sometime called Fort William—in the East Indies." But to return to my story:

Having satisfied myself as to the route I should pursue in order to reach the tomb in question, I bade my informant good-bye, and hastened to my own abode to make arrangements for the journey. Some days after our arrival in Fort William, I had purchased from

a factor, who was on the eve of returning to England, a bay mare of considerable quality. I now gave orders that she should be brought to me for the ride; and, when I had mounted her, set off in the direction indicated by my informant. Prior to starting, however, I took the precaution of concealing a pair of pistols on my person, not knowing whether I might require them before I returned. Then, with a pleasant feeling that I was engaged in something that promised well for an adventure, I set off for the tomb of Wazir Khan. It was not the first time I had ridden abroad, but it was the first occasion on which I had ventured beyond the limits of the settlement. Owing to the bands of thieves—dakoits as they are more properly termed—which prowl the outskirts, but few people venture far into the country, and only then when in a strong party, and equally well armed. Whether I should have felt inclined to do so myself, had I not received the Captain's express instructions not to speak of my business to anyone, is a question to which I can give no fair answer. To have taken a white companion would have been to have let him into the secret, and, in that case, to have had my business talked about by the English community—a circum-

stance which, needless to say, would have done more harm than good. When I had passed through the native village, which, even then, had made considerable progress toward becoming a town, I pressed on as fast as the heat would permit till, by the length of time I had been travelling, I computed that I must be somewhere in the vicinity of the tomb. There is no need for me to enter here upon any description of the country through which I passed. It is sufficient that I could not but compare it with what I had expected to see when I had left England, the comparison being scarcely in favour of the Indies. Hindustan is a land of which it may very well be said that things look better at a distance. The wealth of vegetation that presented a fairy-like picture when a mile away, as one drew nearer, was seen to consist of dust-laden leaves, of cracked and parched earth, while you had unmistakable evidence that the high grass was a place to be avoided by reason of the serpents that had their abodes in it. At last, seeing nothing of the tomb for which I was in search, I stopped my horse and made inquiries of some natives whom I discovered engaged in a mysterious occupation with a basket, a serpent, and a reed pipe, by the wayside.

"If the Sahib," said one of the men, "will turn to his right hand and then ride on toward the river he will find the place he seeks, standing in the jungle."

Urging my mare forward once more, I proceeded in the direction indicated, and in due course saw before me the white roof of a building resembling a house more than a tomb. That this was the place I was seeking I felt sure, for was there not in front of it a large pool or tank, as it is called, built of stones and now half filled with water? On the surface of the latter floated many water lilies; the whole, had it not been for the heat which was stifling in the jungle, presenting a not altogether unpleasing appearance. Dismounting from my mare I made her secure to a tree, and then, having satisfied myself that my pistols were safe and ready for use, approached the tomb. Entering through the doorless portals, I walked into the building, and a more cheerless place I can safely say it has never been my lot to discover. It consisted of a single room, the roof of which had fallen to decay, so that the green leaves of the palms outside could be seen through the holes. The interior was but half lighted, and, as if to prove that it was deserted by man, when I set foot

upon the threshold a large lizard crawled away before me. It was not, however, so empty as I imagined, for I had not advanced more than a few feet inside it before I started back with a cry of horror and amazement. And indeed it was a sight sufficient to appal the boldest. Coming toward me, mewling as it walked, was an object—for I can not call it a man—naked but for a loin cloth, possessed of neither hair, eyebrows, nor beard, and with a skin of a pearly whiteness, most unnatural and terrible to behold. The poor wretch had only one arm, all that remained of the other being a stump; as he moved he uttered a low moaning cry, like that of an animal in pain, regarding me meanwhile with eyes so terrible that a vertigo seized me as I looked at him. I have since learned that he was a leper, who in this country roam about at their own pleasure, but as, till that moment, I had not come in contact with that terrible disease, I was unable to tell it at the time. Stepping—or shall I say gliding? — past me he disappeared through the door, leaving me to wonder what new horror I should next discover. But, so far as I could see, the room was now empty.

For more than ten minutes I waited for someone to put in an appearance, but no one

came. Then I went out again and proceeded round the building in the hope of discovering a person to whom I might at least put a question. My search, however, was unsuccessful. Either I was too early or too late for the appointment, or the summons I had received was a jest played upon me by some unscrupulous person. However that might be, no one could be seen, and even that poor relic of humanity, who had so shocked me on my first appearance at the tomb, seemed to have been caught up into space, so thoroughly had he disappeared. At last, wearied with waiting, and angry with myself and the world in general for having undertaken so futile a ride, I returned to my mare only to find, awaiting me upon the saddle, a chupatti, or cake, of the same description as that I had discovered upon my table. Under the cake was a letter neatly folded and carrying a superscription in the Indian character. From this it was plain that I had not been misled after all. When I had placed the paper in my pocket and the cake with it, for I was not minded to eat the latter until I had discovered who had placed it where I had found it, I looked around me once more, and seeing no one, mounted, and rode slowly away.

'Twas well on toward evening by this time, and, as I was to sup at the house of the Governor, I had but little time to spare. On reaching the factor's house, I placed the letter in a safe place, where it would remain until the Captain returned to read it.

That night I heard many curious things concerning the native people; of their magic, their power of disguising themselves by merely contorting their faces, so that no one could recognise them, and the curious signs and tokens of which they make use when desirous of communicating secretly with each other. You may be very sure I said nothing about the cake, the seed, or of my visit to the tomb, much as I should like to have been enlightened on these heads. However, nothing remained but to await the Captain's return, and then to let him satisfy my curiosity in the matter. Of the man himself, however, there was as yet no sign, and I found it difficult, when the Governor inquired for him, to account satisfactorily for his disappearance. After the party had broken up that evening, the Governor begged leave to detain me for a few moments, saying that he had some information of particular importance to impart to me. I willingly complied with his request and, when

we were alone together, he spoke his mind to me.

"I trust you will believe that I would be the last, Sir Charles," said he, "willingly to give you pain. I feel it is my duty, notwithstanding, to ask your indulgence while I say a few plain words to you. 'Tis concerning your friend, Captain Aloysius O'Rourke, that I would speak to you."

At this I pricked up my ears.

"You are perhaps about to comment upon the fact that the Captain is a man boasting a singularly fine presence," I returned with marked emphasis, in order that he might take warning, should he, by chance, have any charge to bring against my friend.

"That I am quite prepared to admit," he answered, with a faint smile that showed me he had taken my meaning. "'Tis not, however, concerning his bodily attributes, in admiration of which I yield to no man, that I would speak to you. Perhaps you had known him for some time prior to accompanying him on this journey?"

"I had known him scarcely two weeks," I answered.

The Governor placed his finger tips together and looked at me with a solemn face.

"I had an idea that was how the matter stood," he said. "In that case you know next to nothing of his history?"

"I know what he has been pleased to tell me," I replied a little stiffly. "More than that I did not seek to discover. I am not in the habit of asking my friends for confidences they are not inclined to offer me."

"I fear you are offended with me," said the Governor; "yet it was not my intention to say anything that would be likely to give you pain. Nevertheless, having regard for the honoured name you bear, I could not permit you to be drawn into any of his schemes until I had made certain that you were properly familiar with the character of the person of whom we have been speaking."

"I presume nothing is known to his discredit?" I continued, ready at a word to take up the cudgels in defence of my absent friend. "Admitted that he has certain peculiarities of manner, is apt to be a trifle boastful of his own powers, is always ready to start a quarrel and to sustain it with equal impartiality, I did not know that there is anything else against him."

"I will admit the justice of what you say," replied the Governor; "still I think you will

agree with me that a man who has fought more duels than I can remember, who, without a doubt, has incited certain native princes to take arms against our Company, and concerning whom more curious stories are told than I have fingers on my hands, is scarcely a fitting companion for the son of the famous Sir Philip Verrinder."

"That is purely a matter of opinion," said I. "For my own part, I have not such a high opinion of Sir Philip Verrinder's son as to suppose him worthy of so much care in the matter of his choice of friends. I must also confess my inability to see that you have brought forward any argument in support of your theory that the Captain is not a fit companion for myself. After the services he has rendered me, to hear him miscalled, without speaking a word in his defence, would be a churlish act. There would be evil doings, as I fancy you know, should he by any chance come to hear of this interview."

The shaft went home; I saw the old fellow wince and move uneasily upon his seat.

"I hope I may rely upon your treating the matter as a confidential one?" he remarked, with some little hesitation.

I had him fairly in my hands now, and

could not refrain from giving another turn to the screw.

"If, by any chance, there should be a younger man in the fort who entertains the same opinion of my friend," said I, "I might add that I shall be most happy to make the matter a personal one."

"My dear sir, my very dear sir," said the old fellow, who by this time was genuinely unhappy, "you have me at your mercy. If you deem it necessary to repeat what I have said to you, I have no option but to abide the consequences. Can not you see how the matter stands? But for your family name I should not have ventured to say what I did. 'Twas perhaps a foolish act. Had I been so minded I might have held my tongue and have allowed you to go your own way. But I did not choose to do that, and in consequence I hastened to warn you of what I considered to be your danger. My warning has proved futile, and, in addition to that, I have done myself the injury of offending you, and through you the Captain. You will see, sir, that I am perfectly plain with you. In a manner of speaking, my life and honour are in your hands. You have only to tell The O'Rourke, when he returns, of what I have

said, and he will challenge me. I am no swordsman, and the issue will be a foregone conclusion. Three passes at most, and I shall be a dead man. And what would be gained on the other side? However, as the matter is so it must stand."

He said this with such an air of resignation that my heart was touched. I rose and offered him my hand.

"I must crave your forgiveness, sir," I said. "You have endeavoured to help me, and I have repaid your civility by hinting that I should take advantage of your confidence. Let us halve the responsibility. I am to retain the trust you have placed in me, and you, in return, are to think somewhat less harshly of the Captain for the future. Is it a bargain?"

The old man agreed, and seemed greatly relieved to have got out of his difficulty so easily. We parted the best of friends, and I set off for the factor's house. It was late when I reached it; so I made my way at once to my room and prepared to retire to rest. I had scarcely removed my coat, and was still reflecting on the conversation I had had with the Governor, when the door opened, and no less a person than the man we had discussed,

the Captain himself, entered the room. My surprise at seeing him was so great that I stared at him as if he were a ghost, scarcely knowing what to say. He appeared vastly pleased to see me again, and was so solicitous after my welfare that, when I came to consider it afterward, I felt as if I had played the part of a poor friend in not having spoken to the Governor even more firmly than I had done.

"And now you must tell me all that has transpired since I have been absent from the Fort," said he. "Bear it in mind that so far I have heard nothing. Has the rice cake been placed upon the table, and has any letter come to hand for me?"

I was quick to answer him upon this matter, and congratulated myself heartily upon having safely stowed away in my chest the answer I had received at Wazir Khan's tomb, and which I could see he was so anxious to receive. I described my journey to the place in the jungle, told him what had happened there, and received his congratulations upon the care with which I had hidden the letter away on my return.

"Didn't I declare 'twould be well managed?" he cried, as pleased as I was myself at the success which had attended my conduct

of the affair. "And now for this precious letter. Let us examine it. Egad, it should be important, seeing the trouble you have taken over it."

With that I made my way to the handsome cedar-wood chest which stood in a corner of the room, and which I had purchased for the reception of my belongings soon after my arrival in the settlement. The lock was a cunning one, and when it turned to the key, which I carried continually on a ribbon round my neck, it was plain that it had not been tampered with. Yet, what was my consternation, on lifting the lid and searching the tray in which I had placed the precious document, to find it gone! I looked and looked, scarcely able to believe the evidence of my own eyes. I had placed it there only a few hours before, and yet it was not there now. The box was securely locked, nevertheless, and the key safely suspended round my own neck. Who, therefore, was the thief? My back being turned to the Captain, he was not at once aware of the discovery I had made, but from the agitation that seized him when I told him the news, I thought he would have burst into a hurricane of reproach. He controlled himself, however, with an effort, and, seeing my

disappointment, patted me gently on the shoulder.

"This is the work of an enemy," he said in a kindly tone, "and I can hazard a guess as to his name. You may remember that, when I went away, I said be careful, for the reasons that we were in a land peopled by the craftiest folk on earth. Here is an instance to our hand. You say you placed the letter in this chest. None observed you do it, and the lock is a secret one. The very key hung till a moment ago upon your neck. Yet the chest has been opened in your absence and the letter stolen. The thief who took it is no ordinary robber, since nothing else is missing. Now the man whose servants stole that letter, for I feel assured he had no hand in it himself, will read its contents and prepare to act. It is doubly necessary now, for our own sakes, that we should outwit him. And now we must have a further talk together. To-night we have arrived at the cross-roads of our two lives. We must part or go on together. What is the answer? Wilt throw in thy lot with me, lad, and stand or fall upon my fortune? Or shall we say farewell, and go our different ways alone?"

There was the old note in his voice; the

old look of longing in his eyes. My mind was made up—the Governor's advice was thrown to the winds.

"Let there be no talk of separating," I replied, "I am not of that sort. Lead on and I will follow, be the consequences what they may. There's my hand on it."

"Think well first," he continued, with a solemnity unusual to him. "The consequences may be anything; they may be Life, they may be Death, but a man can only die once, and even if 'tis so decreed, you will have seen such life before it comes as no other man ever dreamed of. Believe me, 'tis worth the risk. 'Tis in our hands to change the fate of empires; to build up a nation such as the world has never seen. If, however, like Babel, it totters and falls, 'twill certainly crush us to powder in the ruins."

The tone of his voice, as much as the enthusiasm of his words, took hold upon me, till my blood was afire, and I answered him as I think he knew I should do.

"Lead on," I said again. "I am content to follow, whatever may befall."

He looked at me somewhat sadly I thought, and then drew his hand across his brow.

"'Tis nothing," he answered, seeing that I looked anxiously at him. "A passing spasm, that is all. I have led a hard life this week past and am tired."

Since then I have again and again recalled that look, and strange indeed it seems, viewed in the light of all that has happened since. Then, bidding me good-night, and promising to talk more with me on the morrow concerning the venture together, he left me.

When I retired to rest it was not to sleep. The remembrance that my room had been entered, and that the letter, which I had been so careful to put in a safe place, had been stolen, was sufficient to prevent me from sleeping. The more I thought of it the less able was I to understand it. When I did fall asleep, I dreamt that I had been entrusted by his Majesty with special despatches, which I was to convey to the Governor of Fort William. I was about to start upon my errand when they were found to be missing. Cicely, who was with me, declared that the Captain had stolen them from me, and this he admitted, promising in return for my forgiveness, that he would make me King of Hindustan, with Cicely for my Queen. I was on the point of embracing his proposal, when there came between us an-

other face, that of a woman, with dark, pleading eyes that haunted me continually. She bade me beware of the step I was taking, for it meant death, not for myself, but for those I loved better than my own life. There are many who attach no importance to dreams. Let them read what I have set down here, and afterward endeavour to account for it. "There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in our philosophy," so says good Will Shakespeare, and indeed it would seem so.

CHAPTER VII

NEARLY six months had elapsed since we had said farewell to the English settlement of Fort William, and during that time we had travelled further than I had ever thought to travel in my life. We had penetrated into districts where hitherto no Englishman had set his foot; we had been the guests of kings and princes, and on two occasions had come very near being their victims also. Had it not been for the Captain's cleverness and tact at certain desperate moments, 'tis my belief we should never have come out of our scrapes alive. There were times, indeed, when I looked upon the Future with hopeless eyes and tried to resign myself to what I could only consider was my inevitable fate. Yet, as in the Fleet, when things looked blackest with us 'twas because they were about to mend. After bidding the enemy farewell, we would push forward with greater haste, steering always for that goal where we were to play the parts of which the Captain had spoken to me

in Fort William. He had been careful to inform me what those parts were prior to our departure from the Fort. He had bidden me consider that it was a desperate game we were to play, but I did not realize *how* desperate it really was until I had heard everything. Then I opened my eyes and stared at him in sheer wonderment and consternation. It seemed impossible that we could ever succeed; yet, on second thoughts, one could not but be struck by the grandeur of the scheme.

Summed up in a few words, what we proposed to do was as follows.

One, Bijai Singh, Rajah of Jahlmeer, was killed in battle; thereupon, Pertab Singh, his brother, seized the throne and proclaimed himself rajah in his stead. The fact that his brother left an heir, a boy some seven years of age, was a matter that would not appear to have caused him any great concern. The lad's friends, however, thought differently, and, not being sufficiently powerful to resist Pertab's action, had smuggled the youth out of the city and to a place of safety. Then the new rajah sat down to enjoy the fruits of his scheming, and for eight years had reigned over Jahlmeer, during the whole of which time he had robbed, tortured, maimed and murdered

at his own sweet will. Neither life nor property was safe in his hands. It was said of him, and with considerable truth, that it was only when he swore to rob or revenge that his kingly promise was kept; and it was to the tender mercies of this man, so I gathered from the Captain, that we were about to entrust our lives. It was the latter's intention, if possible, to take service in the rajah's dominions, to build up a standing army, as he had done in another State, and, so soon as the reins were in his own hands, to depose Pertab Singh and to place his nephew upon the throne. The letter I had brought from the tomb of Wazir Khan, and which had been stolen from me, was a communication from the young prince's friends; and it was well nigh certain that the thief, whoever he may have been, was an emissary of the opposite party. Fortunately for our safety, however, it was written in cypher, was not signed, and unless the key were forthcoming, could be of no sort of assistance to anyone.

"If by chance the rajah has obtained possession of it, 'twould let him into the secret and thus make him suspicious," said the Captain when we talked the matter over. "In that case our lives, as soon as we arrive in his

dominions, will not be worth an hour's purchase. As it is, it will be necessary for us to advance with the greatest caution. One mistake, and all will be over with us."

If I wanted adventure, here I had it, enough and to spare. He would have been a glutton indeed who would have asked for more.

For the last week of our journey the aspect of the country through which we were passing had been steadily changing. The more fertile country lay behind us, and we were now entering what was almost desert land. Then, at last, we espied the city before us—Jahlmeer, the beautiful, famed in song and history, her domes and minarets glistening in the sun. As we drew nearer, so beautiful did she become, that as I looked I was scarcely able to believe the evidence of my eyes. 'Twas a picture to be seen once and never afterward forgotten. The very dulness of the landscape around only served as a foil to its beauty; and, unlike so many views, the nearer we approached it the more lovely it became. Mosques and palaces could be distinguished, towering up into the azure sky, while, above all, rose the great Rajput Palace, the abode of the king. 'Twas an exquisite picture, yet, as

I looked, a shudder ran through me. Who knew the fate it held for us in the days that were to be?

Half an hour later we rode our horses across the ford of the rocky river that skirted the base of the hill, and began the ascent that leads to the city itself. Our attendants followed us, and endeavoured to lend an air of importance to an otherwise somewhat insignificant party. We had scarcely reached the first street of the town, however, before we espied coming toward us, splendidly mounted, and decked out in all their Rajput bravery, half a dozen men, the oldest of whom could scarcely have been more than thirty years of age.

"'Tis as I thought then," said the Captain, drawing his horse closer to mine; "by some means the rajah has been made aware of our coming, and these are the men he has sent to conduct us to his presence. Let us hope he has not fathomed the mystery of the letter that was taken from your chest. Should he have done so our life in Jahlmeer is likely to be a very short one."

I was able to agree with him on this point, and was wondering whether it would not have been better for us to have embraced the opportunity offered us and to have escaped while we

had time, rather than to have ventured inside the city, where, if the king were so minded, he could take us at his leisure and escape would be impossible. As soon as we reached them, however, the men made obeisance to us, the elder of the party afterward welcoming us to Jahlmeer in the rajah's name. His Highness, it would appear, had heard of our coming through some of his roaming horsemen, and had sent his envoys to meet us at the entrance to the city. We assured the latter of the pleasure we derived in merely beholding the dominions of his Highness, whose fame had reached to the end of the world, and went on to say that all the dangers through which we had passed were now as nothing, seeing that at last we had the delight of standing upon ground forever to be hallowed by the touch of his Rajput foot.

Having climbed the path, which zigzagged here and there, and turned innumerable corners from the moment it passed the king's elephant houses until it reached the main gate, we came at last to the entrance to the fortress itself. The great gate was thrown open, and, escorted by the men who had been sent to meet us, we entered a large courtyard, passed under a marble archway into another yard

even finer than its predecessor, then up a flight of marble steps, and finally came to a halt in the great antechamber of the palace. 'Twas a noble hall in every way, yet quite unfurnished. From it we passed into an inner and smaller apartment, where one of our guides bade us wait until he had gone forward to inquire the pleasure of the king. Half an hour or so later, during which time we had ample leisure to look about us and to take stock of our position, he returned and signed to us to accompany him.

"'Tis a way they have in this country to keep folk waiting," said the Captain apologetically, as we crossed the room, upon the marble floor of which it seemed an act of basest sacrilege even to set foot. "In this wonderful country time is nothing, and haste a thing unknown. And now a word of warning in your ear. Be careful how you address the man with whom we are about to speak, and, above all, say no more than is necessary for the mere explanation of the matter in hand."

Having promised obedience, I followed him into the king's Audience Chamber, the like of which I had never seen, nor had even dreamed of. It was of the purest white marble—floors, walls, and ceiling—and was capa-

ble of holding at least five hundred people. At the further end was a throne of ivory, and seated upon it a man whose identity I could guess at once. That he was of the purest Rajput blood could be easily seen, though in stature he was somewhat below the usual height. It was plain, also, that our coming had been expected, for he was dressed to receive us—and with the greatest magnificence. Jewels of enormous value were scattered about his person in reckless profusion; their worth alone would have been sufficient to make a man rich beyond the dreams of avarice. After the manner of Rajputs he wore his beard long, parted in the middle, and brushed back over either ear. But it was not his dress, his throne, his wealth of jewels, or his beard that fascinated me so much as his eyes. In them was to be found an unending indolence mixed with the most cunning cruelty; an apathy that defied description, yet which carried with it a look of debauchery that was almost inhuman. All this, as I have said, was in his eyes, and, when I recalled our reasons for being where we were, and reflected that it was against him we were pitting our wits, I must confess that my heart sank within me. No tiger that roamed the hills could have been more dan-

gerous or more cruel than this man. Now that I had seen him in the flesh I could easily credit the stories I had heard concerning him. They were such as made the cheek blanch and the breath come in heavy gasps; tales that made one long for the vengeance of the sword. God help the rightful heir to the throne, said I, should he ever venture within reach of this man's claws.

Having made obeisance before him, we waited for him to speak. When he did so, the depth of his voice came as a distinct surprise to me. It seemed too great in volume to proceed from so small a body.

"What seek ye in my dominions?" inquired he. "What is it ye hope to find?"

In reply, the Captain informed him that the wonderful story of his kingdom had penetrated to the uttermost parts of the earth, and that we, being filled with envy, had come to satisfy ourselves that such tales were true. Whether the rajah believed him or not I can not say; at any rate, he affected to do so. After which he proceeded to question him as to the way we had come, and whether 'twas true that certain base-borns of our nation and colour had harried the Bengalis and had taken possession of their territory?

We informed him that it was even as he had said.

"Had they come to me," he cried, in a voice of scorn, "I would have driven them back into the sea, so that they would have troubled me no more!"

"No one would have dared to have set foot upon the territories of your Highness," said the Captain, with crafty flattery, "but for Bengalis 'tis a different matter."

"That is certainly so," answered the rajah; "and from what thou sayest, 'tis evident that thou art a man of sense. We will talk more upon this matter anon. In the meantime it is my pleasure that ye be well received, and all your wants be supplied."

With that he turned to one of his Court, standing behind him, and gave some orders in a low voice. Whether this meant that we were to be hurled from the battlements or to be poisoned at our next meal; or, on the other hand, to be treated with the sanctity of privileged guests, I could not say. That was a matter which only the Future could decide, and to the Future we had to leave it.

After we had made obeisance before the king, we followed our guide back along the route we had come, until we found ourselves

standing once more in the great courtyard of the palace. 'Twas indeed a place to marvel at. Who had first built it, or where it had been first begun, was impossible to say. 'Tis probable that generations of rajahs had set their hands to it, and that each had left something to mark his reign. How many men the palace itself contained, and how many women also, was a question most difficult to answer. But the fact remained that, occupied by a good garrison, it was well nigh, if not quite, impregnable. When we had crossed a second courtyard, and had climbed another massive stone staircase, we found ourselves upon the battlements. Such a view as was presented to us then it would be difficult to match in the length and breadth of the Indies. Three hundred feet below us, bathed in the soft evening light, was a blue lake, and in the centre of this lake an ivory white palace, so beautiful that it scarce seemed the work of human hands. This, we discovered later, was the king's zenana, and communicated with the palace, as I now have good reason to know, by means of a passage running beneath the lake. Could that passage have spoken, strange and terrible stories would it have been able to tell. Many, indeed, were the little hands that had been

held up in supplication upon the terraces of the White Island, and many were the piercing shrieks that had preceded a splash in the dark waters as the result of some suspicion and a jealousy that could only be appeased by death. For the present, however, it was wonderfully beautiful, and as peaceful as a sleeping child. When he had led us along the battlements for a short distance, our guide paused before a low door, and invited us to enter. Having done so, we found ourselves standing in a lofty room, which had evidently been furnished for our accommodation. Our own servants had preceded us, and were now engaged in preparing for our arrival. We had entertained some fears lest they might not be permitted to accompany us into the palace; their presence, therefore, was the more reassuring. Having taken from our baggage a pair of inlaid pistols, which we had brought with us for the purpose, we handed them for conveyance to the king, at the same time presenting the guide himself with another and different token of our esteem. He, thereupon, withdrew, leaving us alone together. As soon as he was gone the Captain threw himself upon the cushions.

"So far so good," he said. "We have

now got our bark fairly under weigh, and, with a favouring breeze, 'twill not be our fault if we do not reach port safely. Now that you have seen him, Charles, what think ye of his Highness of Jahlmeer?"

"I do not know that I am altogether prepossessed in the fellow's favour," replied I, with a shrug of the shoulders. "He's not the sort of person a man would be likely to make a friend of. Indeed, it seemed to me, when I was gazing into his face, that he was looking into my brain and reading my secret there. Heaven defend us if he discovers what we have in our minds concerning him!"

"'Tis not likely he will do that," said the Captain, with a confidence I was very far from sharing with him. "Mark my words, the day will come when you and I will stand together in this castle as its rulers. The young rajah, Shajai Rao, will be only a puppet in our hands; we will build up the Kingdom, place the army on a proper footing, and who knows but that in time we may be masters of all this mighty continent? 'Tis a dream that befits a man, and you and I will share it."

As he spoke his eyes glistened, and his voice had a note of triumph in it that was calculated to move me beyond measure. Big,

burly, and gross though he was, for the time being, at least, he was transformed. His enthusiasm spoke to me like a trumpet-call, and in my own heart I felt that if there was one man living who could perform the feat which he had planned, that man was now before me. Then, calling our servants to our room, the Captain spoke to them in their own tongue. He had no fear of their loyalty, he declared; at the same time, it was necessary that he should give them certain advice as to their behaviour while in the palace of the rajah. They received it with their usual submission, and were prepared to promise anything he might ask of them, while, as we knew, as soon as we were out of the way, they would be equally ready to go over to our enemies, should they prove the stronger. There was, however, one thing in their favour, or, to be more correct, in ours; they were, so to speak, in a strange country, surrounded by men of a different race and religion. The burly Rajputs despised them, and, as they were aware, with but slight provocation, would have driven them to slaughter like so many sheep.

Later in the day, the king's minister returned once more, this time bearing presents from his Majesty and accompanied by the

royal minstrel, who chanted songs in our honour. The king, so the latter led us to understand, was gratified beyond measure at our coming, and had declared that the sun would shine more kindly upon Jahlmeer, his soldiers would prove better fighting men, and his horses stronger and swifter, since we had deigned to cast our eyes upon them. When we had replied in suitable terms, he withdrew, and the minstrel with him; not, however, before both had endeavoured a little intriguing upon their own account. It was plain to them, from the interest the rajah had taken in us, that we were persons of importance, and as such worthy of being conciliated. For this reason we heard what one thought of the other, and were asked to believe that the speaker of the moment was the only person who had the king's ear, and who might be trusted as an adviser. Then they vanished and more servants arrived, bearing presents of fruit and food for our acceptance. These having been spread before us, I looked at the Captain inquiringly.

"You need have no fear," he said, reassuringly. "His Highness has not learnt our reason for being here, so that he is scarcely likely to season our dishes so soon. When

we have offended or thwarted him will be the time for us to refuse to eat what he sends us. In the meantime let us fall to with a good will, for we have accomplished much to-day."

We did so, though not without some qualms upon my part, and partook heartily of what had been sent to us. Then, placing our pistols near us in case they should be needed during the night, we laid ourselves down to rest. The night passed without incident of any kind, and, much refreshed by a good sleep, we faced the new-born day with a confidence as to what it should bring forth that was almost like the faith of childhood. Later, when the sun had risen, a messenger arrived, inviting us in the king's name to an elephant fight in the courtyard below. "Which, in other words," said the Captain, "means that his Highness is suspicious, and is anxious to see something more of us. 'Twould be as well to be prepared, for these men in some ways are like children, and enjoy nothing so much as a quarrel, and to pit one against the other. Should he call upon you, do not think twice, but take your place and do your best. 'Tis the next few hours that will decide the question as to whether we shall be permitted to

proceed upon the enterprise that has brought us here or not."

With that we made our preparations, and then accompanied our guides along the battlements, and down the stone steps by which we had ascended on the previous evening, to the courtyard below. When we had reached it we found the rajah already seated in his chair of honour, on a marble platform above the arena. He had taken his morning dose of opium, as is the custom of the Rajputs, and at the moment was looking upon the world with favourable eyes. When we approached him he received us with considerable graciousness, and signed to us to stand beside him on the stone platform upon which his chair had been placed. A low wall divided the courtyard midway, the reason for which became apparent when, a few minutes later, at a signal, a couple of magnificent elephants, each ridden by a man, came trumpeting and bellowing into the arena, and took up their places on either side of it. The rajah was delighted at their appearance, and clapped his hands vigorously. Then he gave the word, and the two great beasts threw themselves upon each other. Encouraged by the shouts and goads of their riders, they endeavoured to tear each other to

pieces. It was an exhibition of strength and blind fury that I had never thought to have witnessed, and upon the spectators it had a maddening effect. Then the Captain, seeing which was the weaker, made a wager with the rajah that it would win; and when the fight was over and he had lost, it only served to add to the ruler's delight in the combat.

"'Twas a battle worthy of princes," he cried, and immediately ordered another pair of beasts to be brought in. When this was done, a second combat commenced, and once more the Captain essayed his luck. As chance had it, however, this time he was on the winning side, and the rajah's face clouded like that of a spoilt child. Turning to the keeper of the elephants, he bade him remove the vanquished animal, chain him, and scourge him till the blood flowed.

"He was badly ridden," said he. "Let the man be scourged also. When next he rides before me it will pay him to do well, or I bind him to the elephants and let them tear him limb from limb, till there is nothing left."

Then tiring, according to his wont, of an amusement from which the first novelty had departed, he gave orders that the victorious elephant should remain in the arena, and that

a brace of tigers should be let loose upon him. It was the first time I had seen the man-eater of the jungle at large, and I will confess that the sight somewhat disquieted me. It was not a moment in which one felt altogether comfortable. The place on which we stood was such a short distance removed from the arena that it seemed scarcely possible the great animals would avoid pouncing upon us. Yet, apart from the danger of the moment, there was something about the exhibition that claimed our attention and held us spell-bound. Having been but that minute released from their dark cages under the palace wall, the two tigers were somewhat dazed. They quickly recovered themselves, however, and looked about them as if to decide whom they should first attack. Then the wounded elephant at the further end of the courtyard attracted their attention, and they began to move slowly toward him, creeping with a cat-like tread that was the more horrible because of its stealthiness. Nearer and nearer they drew, and all the time the great beast against whom they were so soon to pit their strength watched them with apparent unconcern. His driver was no longer upon his back, but he needed no goad to make him fight; as one of the by-

standers informed me, he had been starved for several days, and was ready and willing to do battle for his life. When only a few yards separated him from his enemies he raised his trunk and trumpeted aloud, so that the Palace rang with the sound. Then, advancing a few steps toward his foes, he stopped and awaited their onslaught. It was an anxious moment. One of the tigers had withdrawn a little way from his companion, and was now preparing for a spring. A moment later he was launched in mid-air and had alighted on the elephant's head, clutching with his great claws on the forehead midway between the ears. With a cry of rage the animal tossed his trunk and endeavoured to throw him off, but in vain. The cat-like creature clung the tighter, and 'twas plain 'twould require a greater effort to remove him. Meanwhile the second tiger, still keeping clear, and giving his friend time to become firmly fixed, was preparing to commence an attack upon the other side. It was a battle such as I had never thought could be possible. As things were then it would seem as if the elephant were no match for two such deadly foes; but, as we were soon to discover, he was their equal and more besides. By dint of dashing himself against the wall, he man-

aged to effect the removal of the animal upon his head. Then, seizing him with his trunk he tossed him into the air, caught him again as soon as he had fallen, and a moment later had trampled him to death with his great fore feet upon the stones of the courtyard. 'Twas done so quickly that the tiger lay dead before we could realize what had happened. But the struggle was not yet over. There was still the other beast, clinging to his flank, to be accounted for. Having rid himself of one of his foes, the elephant, with a sagacity one would scarcely have expected of a dumb beast, threw himself upon the ground, and began to roll over and over on his side until the tiger, to avoid being crushed, must needs let go his hold, only to leap upon him again before the animal could get upon its feet.

For a space in which a man might have counted thirty, there was nothing to be seen in the courtyard but the two struggling beasts, while the only noise was the loud trumpeting of the elephant and the snarling of the tiger. Then the striped body of the smaller animal swung within reach of that deadly trunk. It wound about it like a snake, snatched it off, and threw it a dozen paces away. Once more the tiger returned to the attack, but this time

his foe was better prepared for him and met him half way. Holding him down as he had done his companion, he endeavoured to trample upon him, but the effort was in vain. The sharp teeth of the striving creature beneath him closed upon the trunk, and in an instant the blood gushed forth. Smarting under the pain the elephant was unable to continue to hold him down or to draw him beneath his feet. At last he was compelled to let go, and in a moment the tiger was up and away, crouching in a further corner of the yard. Then followed a period of waiting, in which the elephant, the tiger, and the spectators seemed to struggle for breath. I looked about me, first at the battlefield, then at the rajah, curled up in his chair of state, revelling in the cruelty of the fight, and last at the Captain, stalwart and erect, his red face aglow with an excitement I had not seen on it before. Behind me was the great wall of the Palace, in which were several windows, covered with hanging grass blinds that caught the faintest breeze, and which were occasionally drawn an inch aside by tiny fingers. My instinct told me that the king's women, though themselves unseen, were watching the battle proceeding in the yard below. Why I should

have taken so much interest in them I can not say, yet, if the truth must be told, I found my eyes wandering continually toward the window that was nearest me. Then, little by little, so cautiously indeed that it was hard to say it moved, the curtain was drawn aside and a woman's face looked forth. From that moment all else, rajahs, nobles, elephants, and tigers, were alike forgotten, and my thoughts were occupied only with the remembrance of a certain dream. For there, peering out at me for one brief second, was the face of the woman who, in the dream I had had at Calcutta, had hovered between Cicely and myself. The face with its great dark eyes, the perfect moulding of the mouth and chin, were identical. I should have recognised it among a thousand. I was still thinking of this, and wondering what it could betoken, when his Highness gave the signal for the combat to proceed. It was soon evident, however, that if there was to be another battle a fresh tiger must be forthcoming, this one being weary of the fight and by no means anxious to proceed further with it. On this being pointed out to him, the rajah turned to his retinue, and inquired whether there was one present who would go down and slay the tiger where he

stood? There was no movement among the courtiers, however, Rajputs though they were. The contest doubtless appeared too unequal to commend itself to them. I looked again at the window, this time as if for encouragement. Again the rushes were drawn aside for one moment, the face looked out, and our eyes met. Throwing all thought of prudence to the winds, I approached his Highness, bowed, and craved his permission to descend and execute his errand. This having been granted me, I leapt from the platform, and with a long, keen blade, which I had borrowed from one of the nobles, in my hand, walked warily across the courtyard to where the sullen beast was crouching in a corner. What had induced me to enter upon such a foolish contest I can not say, but having embarked upon it I was determined not to draw back.

I have said that the tiger was *crouching* in a corner of the courtyard; this, however, was scarcely the truth. He had been there, but as soon as I set foot upon the stones, he reared himself and awaited my coming in an attitude not unlike that assumed by a cat when about to pounce upon a mouse. At close quarters he looked twice his former size. His mask and fore paws were stained with blood, and as

he watched me he licked his lips with a relish, I could only think, for what was to come. Seated as he was, he had the advantage of me. I could do nothing until I had drawn him from his corner. But how was I to do it, seeing that he evidently had no desire to come forth? It was an anxious moment, and yet withal a moment that was not without its pleasures. I was strong and active, eager for the struggle, and if only I could induce the tiger to give me the opportunity I wanted, it was not unlikely, Providence always helping me, that I should come successfully out of the encounter. Meanwhile not a sound came from the assemblage on the platform; everyone was watching and waiting for what was to follow. At last, seeing no other way of inducing him to venture into the open, I took off my coat, and holding it before me with my left hand, advanced toward him, carrying my sword in my right. When I was only a few paces distant from him, and could see that he was gathering himself for his spring, I hurled the coat in his face and then rushed in upon him. Blinded by the garment, and taken at a disadvantage, he sprang into the air and by good fortune missed me. Leaping back a pace, I awaited my opportunity, and as soon as it arrived

thrust forward at his side with all the strength at my command. It took him behind the shoulder and between the ribs. With a yell of pain, he stumbled and rolled upon his side. Then, for a space, during which a man might have counted fifty, there followed a fight of the remembrance of which nothing remains with me save a vague recollection of a mass of evil-smelling fur, a great foam-flecked face, the teeth of which more than once came perilously near my shoulder. Deeper and deeper I drove my blade into his side. By what manner of means I escaped being hit by his gigantic paws I can not say; yet it is certain that I did escape. Neither of these things happened, however, and at last, after what seemed an eternity of waiting, I felt a slackening of the great body to which I was so tightly clinging; the movement of the legs became gradually less; then the monster's head fell back with a groan, and I knew that the victory was mine.

I staggered to my feet, and as I did so, such a shout went up from the assemblage as doubtless that courtyard has never heard before, or since. Even the rajah himself deigned to applaud my success, as, covered with blood though I was, but still carrying my

weapon in my hand, I made my way across to the platform where he was standing. He was delighted at my achievement; such a fight, he asserted, had never been seen before. 'Twas a deed worthy of a Rajput, and the Court Poet, he vowed, should that day perpetuate my deed in verse, so that generations as yet unborn should know how the Stranger, armed only with a dagger, slew the Lord of the Jungle.

While he was speaking I looked up at the window above my head, and there, sure enough, peering out at me, was the face I had seen before. This time it smiled, and when I saw this I felt that until that moment I had not been rewarded. Then the curtain fell back into its place and I saw no more. It was as if the sun had withdrawn his light from the earth, and with its departure a great mist rose before my eyes, and I felt my strength leaving me. I saw the king rise from the chair in which he had seated himself; I saw the Captain take a step forward to catch me, and then I knew no more. My senses fled, and, stretching my arms out, I fell unconscious on the stones before them all.

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN I recovered my senses, after having fallen in a swoon at the rajah's feet, as described in the last chapter, I found myself once more in our own quarters upon the battlements. The Captain, with a troubled face, was kneeling by my side, and the sigh of relief with which he greeted my return to consciousness showed plainly enough how anxious he had been concerning me.

"Dear lad!" he cried in his impulsive Irish way that always took possession of him when excited, "the Saints be praised, ye're your rightful self once more. 'Tis a great fright ye have given me; and, bedad, if ye'd not come round soon, by all the O'Rourkes that are gone before me, I'd have pulled this old palace about their ears for the trouble they've given me. Are ye certain ye're better now?"

I assured him that I was feeling quite myself once more, which, though not quite the

truth, was sufficient to set at rest the anxiety he was showing on my account.

"'Twas a mad trick ye played to-day," said he; "but a braver I never saw. And if 'tis any satisfaction to know it, I may say the rajah thinks with me. Man alive! when I saw ye go down to that beast in the corner, my heart fairly stopped beating. 'He'll be killed entirely,' says I to meself. Then up gets the tiger. ''Tis simple murder,' says meself to me; and then you made a lunge at him and over he went upon his side. 'Bedad, the boot's on the other foot,' says I to meself. After that there was a busy show, with you and the tiger all wrapped up together. Presently up ye get upon your feet. 'May the Saints be praised!' says I, 'he's killed the brute.' And then you came forward to the rajah, who by this time was fairly beside himself with delight. 'He's a very Rajput!' he cried, clapping his hands; 'a very Rajput!' 'He's my best friend,' says I. 'He shall be one of my body guard,' says he; and at that selfsame moment down you went at his feet and I leapt forward to pick you up. 'Send for Ram Lal,' cries the rajah. 'Send for Tommy Dodd,' says I to meself; 'there's no native physician going to lay so much as a finger upon him.' Then, very

politely I gave his Highness to believe that I understood the case perfectly, and that, if he would permit a couple of his men to carry you up here, I would promise to make you yourself again in the twinkling of an eye. That I have done, but 'tis more than an hour since we got you here. I'm the bravest man on earth, and I'll run the knave through the ribs who has the audacity to tell me to my face I am not, but I've had such a fright this day that another like it would make an old man of me. Bear that in mind, now."

From what he had said I could see that I had had a narrow escape; but since I *had* escaped, and the exhibition I had given with the tiger had served to please the rajah, we had the right to declare that "all was well that ended well." That his Highness *was* pleased at my victory over the king of the jungle there could be no sort of doubt. 'Twas plain that for the time being I was in high favour—a fact which perhaps accounted for the desire shown by the king's ministers to do all that lay in their power to gain my goodwill. They were a scurvy crew, and I found my gorge rise at them.

For the remainder of the day, though I protested vehemently against it, the Captain insisted upon my remaining in our quarters

instead of going abroad again. After the mid-day siesta, during which the whole Palace was without a sound, he betook himself to the Hall of Audience, where he had an interview with his Highness, from which he returned later on in a high good humour.

"Everything is progressing finely," said he, "and if his Highness will consent to remain in the same mood for another week, I fancy we shall be able to get him to grant us all we want."

It would appear from what he told me that he had pointed out to the rajah the advantages he would obtain by placing his army on an European footing, and, in proof of the wisdom of his arguments, called upon him to witness the success which had crowned the Captain's efforts in a neighbouring State. Following upon the heels of this, he had drawn a vivid picture of the benefits to be gained by the employment of such a force. I could imagine how well he had done this. Indeed, there was no other man living who could have done it so well. In the end he, the rajah, so The O'Rourke had pointed out, was to be The Emperor of all the Indies; but he was to remember that the Captain was the only man who would be able to place him upon that

pinnacle. With this alluring bait held out to him, it was scarcely a matter for wonderment that the rajah fell into the trap. Though a cruel and vindictive rascal from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head, he was not lacking in ambition. The Captain's words, therefore, fell upon good soil, and were destined to bear fruit even more quickly than we had expected. The following morning he was again sent for, and was more fully questioned upon the subject. How was the scheme to be carried out, what number of men would be required, and what would be the cost? The Captain replied to the effect that all he required was permission to raise three battalions of disciplined infantry, a suitable number of artillery, and the equivalent of cavalry. The pay of the men was to be guaranteed by the State, and he, Aloysius O'Rourke, was to be invested with supreme command, myself serving as second under him. To this, at first, his Highness did not appear at all willing to consent. From the Rajput point of view, he considered artillery a mistake, while infantry was but little better. From an effective standpoint he preferred the fierce onslaught of his own irregular cavalry, which swept everything before it or was shattered in the attempt. The

Captain, however, was firm. It must be as he wished, said he, otherwise he would refuse to have anything to do with the matter. In consequence the rajah's obstinacy was aroused and the interview came near being a failure. The light of his countenance was altogether withdrawn from us for the next few days, and the army scheme, for the time being, fell to the ground. The insubordinate behaviour of certain of his wives had necessitated his undivided attention; in addition to this, the Prime Minister, Lakwan Rao, jealous of our growing influence, was doing his best to undermine our position.

"'Tis just at this particular period," said the Captain, when we were talking the matter over, "that we shall have to be most careful. As you are aware, there is a certain party in the Palace, which would be only too pleased to see our power gone and our backs turned on the city. From what I know of several of its members I am certain of this much, that they are not the men to permit a chance to pass them of attaining the end they have in view."

In consequence we doubled our precautions, ate nothing which we were not certain our own servants had prepared, slept with our

arms beside us, and never ventured from our own portion of the Palace after night had fallen. In spite of the care we took to guard against surprise, however, we found that we were but a poor match for the men against us.

One evening, the night being warm, we were standing upon the battlements overlooking the lake below. Above us the stars shone in the sky like myriads of lamps, and were reflected in the dark waters beneath. We had been talking of the various events that had befallen us since we had first met in the Fleet Prison, had recalled the incidents connected with our happy escape from the Bow Street Runners at Mr. Pennyfeather's house, and were wondering whether the kindly old man ever had a thought to spare for us, when we were startled by the sound of a whistling noise, like that of a sharp instrument passing swiftly through the air. The Captain sprang round, and it was well that he did so, for at the same instant a long, thin-bladed knife struck the stonework against which he had been leaning and fell with a clatter at his feet. He stooped and picked it up, only to find that it was an ordinary native knife without any distinguishing mark upon it.

"I thought 'twould not be very long be-

fore they commenced their playful little tricks," said he, calmly enough, as he turned the thing over in his hands.

Then he set off along the battlements in an endeavour to discover the whereabouts of the person who had thrown it. No sign of anyone, however, was to be seen, and a few minutes later he returned, shaking his head.

"'Twould be easier to find a needle in a bundle of straw," said he. "These rascals are able to hide themselves in a smaller space than any other human beings. But 'twill serve one good purpose, 'twill act as a warning to us to keep our wits on the alert. We must be more careful for the future."

Next morning, to the Captain's delight, the Maharajah's favour was entirely restored. A company of native wrestlers had put in an appearance at the Palace, and his Highness invited us to be present at their performance. In due time, therefore, we repaired to the great courtyard, where the Prince and his attendants were already assembled. The company of actors was drawn up on the further side, and immediately the rajah gave the signal, the performance commenced. The first to appear was a magician, who, having seated himself on the stones a short distance from the

rajah, proceeded to execute such marvels as held me spellbound with astonishment. Had I been told of such things, and had not seen them for myself, I could not have found it in my heart to have believed them. At his bidding trees grew, and not only grew but bore fruit, though the seed, only a moment before, had been planted in a handful of mud; he swallowed a stone, and immediately fire spurted from his mouth and nose; then, as if this were not enough, he called up his little son, whom he placed in a basket scarce large enough to hold him, then having run a sword through it times out of number, until it appeared certain he had killed the little lad, he opened the basket, and showed it as empty as when we had first seen it. 'Twas a devilish piece of work, and in Old England would have secured for him a ducking in the nearest horsepond on a charge of being leagued with the Evil One. When he had withdrawn, some feats of strength followed, in which one man held aloft a pole, full thirty feet in length, while another climbed it like a monkey and stood upon his head at the top. After these followed several brawny wrestlers, who offered such a good display of their talents that his Highness ordered money to be given them

with permission to return at some not far distant date. The winner, a lusty fellow of near about the same height as myself, then stood boldly forward and challenged any one present to come out and dispute his claim to be considered the strongest man. The rajah's eyes twinkled wickedly, and I could tell what was passing in his mind. At last, he was telling himself, a chance had come for humbling the Captain before those present.

"How now, my friend," said he, turning to The O'Rourke, "is it possible for thee to put yonder fellow upon his back? If so, thou art indeed a General fit to lead my army."

"I will place him upon his back in a twinkling if your Highness so pleases," answered The O'Rourke, squaring his great shoulders in anticipation of the combat.

His Highness stroked his beard.

"The goat bleats loud of what it can do when it is in the byre, and the wolves are howling in the jungle."

"If your Highness will but say the word," said the Captain, whose vanity was nettled, "I will break yonder wolf's back between my fingers."

With that he left the rajah's side and walked out into the open space where the

wrestler, who had heard what had passed between them, was awaiting his coming. Throwing off his coat and rolling up his sleeves, he prepared to meet the foe. A finer picture than he presented then it would indeed have been hard to find. In justice to both it must be confessed that they were both fine figures of men. They regarded each other steadfastly for a few moments, and then the play commenced. I had hoped, and expected, that the Captain would win, but I had never thought that the struggle would be of such short duration. After a few preliminary flourishes, which counted for naught, they came together, and before a man might have said *hey presto*, the Indian was upon his back. He leapt to his feet again, however, and once more closed, with the same result as before. The rajah and his Court looked on in silent amazement. The fellow was noted throughout the State for his strength and cunning, and yet here was a stranger who was not only stronger than he, but could do with him as he pleased. It was a thing scarcely believable, and as I looked at the rajah's face I noted that his eyes were glistening with rage. He called the wrestler up to him when he had been thrown for the third time, and bade him

have a care and not be beaten again. The rascal was not wanting in spirit, for he bowed and went back to where the Captain was awaiting him. Then they fell to once more, but, so far as the Indian was concerned, with no better success than before. Despite his Highness's caution, 'twas plain that the Captain could do with him as he pleased. At last, tiring of such child's play, and being anxious to show the rajah what he really could accomplish when he had set his mind upon it, he bade the fellow bring forward the knave with whom he had previously struggled. The rajah clapped his hands with delight. At last, said he to himself, this braggart will assuredly meet his match. It was beyond human belief that he could contend and be victorious against two such men. But as yet he did not know the man with whom he had to deal. Nor could I have believed, had I not witnessed it, that The O'Rourke was the possessor of such strength. The two men having consulted together for a moment, came forward, one a little before the other. Then, having made a feinting movement, they rushed in at him. For a moment I thought they were about to overthrow him, but this impression lasted but a moment. Putting forth all his strength, he

seized them by their loin-cloths, one in either hand, and, lifting them aloft, walked with them to the place where the rajah was seated. Then, having laid them gently down, he bowed to the Prince and went back to pick up his coat from where it lay, as if he had done nothing for them to marvel at. 'Twas so well done that none could withhold their praise.

"By the tombs of my ancestors, but thou art a man," cried the rajah in a tone of great approval. "I would that I had a hundred like thee." Then, turning to the vanquished fellows, he continued: "Ye have been beaten by a man who is more than a man. There is no disgrace accruing to ye."

The wrestlers, however, appeared to think otherwise; and I told myself, as I scanned their dusky faces, that it was plain we had made yet another pair of enemies.

That afternoon, while the Captain was attending upon the rajah, I chanced to be in the courtyard of the Palace, when I was stopped by a man whom I did not remember to have seen before. In his arms he carried a little gray ape but little larger than a baby. "'Twas a gift," said he, "for my lord who had done such mighty things that day, from his Highness the Rajah." What the Captain was going

to do with it I could not say; but, believing it to be a token of his Highness' goodwill, I bade the man convey it to our quarters, which he did. On my arrival there I found that the Captain had not yet returned; the man with the monkey, however, was still waiting. Bidding him place the animal on the ground, secured by the little chain he had attached to his waist, I rewarded him and let him go. The fellow immediately disappeared, and a few moments later I heard the Captain's step upon the stones.

At last, he informed me, the rajah had given his consent to the plan he had formed for the army, and the work of enrolling recruits would commence forthwith.

"'Tis plain that his Highness is more kindly disposed toward us," said I. "If further evidence were wanting, here is the ape to give it."

I then showed him the gift which had been sent for his acceptance. On hearing this the Captain pricked up his ears.

"Did you say his Highness sent it?" asked he, as if he did not understand.

I told him the message the man had given me, but he only shook his head.

"There's mischief somewhere," said he;

" his Highness said nothing to me concerning it. Had he sent it, he would assuredly have done so. In this country 'tis better to suspect everyone, and particularly when they pretend to be most friendly. Besides, what use have I for a gray ape? I am not a child."

All this time the animal was watching us from the place where it was chained. 'Twas a strange little beast, and looked almost human as it sat up regarding us. Then the Captain, thinking no more of his gift, proceeded to give me the substance of his interview with the king; and having done so, allowed his imagination full play, and spoke of the glorious future which we were to share together. He had scarcely finished by the time our servants appeared with the evening meal. Ram Dass was the first to enter, and, having set his dishes before us, was departing from the room when the monkey, who had hitherto been curled up in a corner, suddenly sprang forward and bit him on the hand. The man uttered a cry and shook the beast off, then turned to us as if he were anxious to excuse his conduct.

" 'Tis a surly little brute," said the Captain, " and will require taming. You have my leave to go, Ram Dass. 'Twould be better

that you should remember not to venture within reach of his chain again."

The man salaamed and was moving toward the door when he staggered, and a moment later had measured his length upon the floor.

"What's this?" cried the Captain, leaping to his feet, his usually red face now deadly pale. "Then my suspicions are correct. The monkey was a gift from our enemies, and his teeth are poisoned. 'Tis a trick they have."

With that he crossed the room to the man upon the floor, and knelt beside him. The poor fellow was in agonies, and it needed but small experience to tell that some deadly poison was at work upon him. Despite our efforts nothing could be done, and he died in the Captain's arms within twenty minutes of having been bitten by the ape.

What our fate would have been had he bitten one of us, as he was doubtless intended to do, we dared not think.

"I will be revenged upon them for this," cried the Captain, rising to his feet. "Let me discover the author of this villainy and he shall feel the weight of my wrath, as certainly as my name is O'Rourke. You can now see for yourself something of the sort of mercy we

shall receive if we fail in what we have set ourselves to do."

"What is there to be done? What can you do?" I inquired, for I was as angry as he at the fiendish attempt that had been made upon our lives.

"Seek out the rajah at once," the Captain replied. But when we sent a messenger to the king, he returned with the information that his Highness would not see anyone.

"Well, if he will not see me to-night, he shall give me an interview to-morrow morning," said the Captain. "As I live, I will not be put off. They have poisoned my servant; and I'll have Lakwan Rao's head, if necessary, for his share in the transaction."

"In the meantime, what is to be done with the ape?" inquired I.

"Let him remain where he is," answered The O'Rourke. "He is quite safe if we do not venture within reach of his chain. We'll not let him out of our sight; for if they get the opportunity, they'll substitute another for him, and when he is pronounced harmless, we shall be accused of having murdered Ram Dass for reasons of our own. Egad, 'tis well that we know the sort of people with whom we have to deal."

I was able to agree with him upon this point.

That night, being resolved not to leave anything to chance, we took turns in standing guard over the beast which had brought our poor servant to such an untimely end. It is doubtful whether a little gray ape was ever honoured by such a bodyguard before. Next morning, as soon as the proper time had arrived, a basket was procured, and the animal, with some difficulty, was placed inside it. When he had been made secure, the Captain bade a servant take it up and accompany us to the audience chamber of the king.

"His Highness sends his salaams and is grieved that he can not see you this morning," said the Chamberlain, when we had presented ourselves at the door of the Marble Hall. "He is not well, and must not be disturbed."

"He was well enough a quarter of an hour since," returned the Captain, his great face flushing even redder than was customary. "Give him our respectful salaams, and say that we ask the honour of being permitted to confer with him on a matter of the greatest importance to the State. If our request is not granted we shall take the matter in our own hands and act accordingly."

The man gazed at him as if he could scarce believe he heard aright. Then he took his departure, to return a few minutes later with the message that the rajah would see us, but that he was angered by our persistence.

"He can be as angry as he pleases," said the Captain to me in English. "I only hope the man who inspired this bit of rascality is with him. If so I fancy I shall find a way of detecting him."

By this time we had reached the Hall where we had had our first audience with the king. Here, despite the excuse he had made, we found the rajah seated on his throne with all his Court assembled about him. The look he wore upon his face was sufficient to show me that he was far from being in an amiable frame of mind—his beard brushed fiercely back over his ears said as much. His hands trembled upon the arms of the throne, and he glared at us from overhanging brows as we approached.

"Am I a dog or a slave that I should be ordered to do your will?" he began. "What is this news you bring that calls for such attention?"

"It is a business of life and death," the Captain replied. "My friend and I are your

Highness's guests. Our honour is your honour, and we rest under the shadow of your protection."

"And has that protection been withdrawn that ye beard me thus?" answered the king. "What more would ye have?"

"We ask permission to live," my companion replied. "But yesterday a gift was brought to us from your Highness in the shape of a little gray ape. 'Twas said to be a mark of your favour. I would have you understand, however, that the teeth of that ape had been poisoned."

"Poisoned?" cried the king, half rising from his seat. "It can not be. Ye must have dreamt this tale. Know ye not that Hanuman is a god, and sacred?"

This point, I think, struck the Captain for the first time. I only know that the full cunning of the scheme then became apparent to me. 'Twas cleverly arranged, for, even had we failed to be bitten, we should have incurred the displeasure of the king, inasmuch as we should have committed what he could only have considered an act of sacrilege. The priests would then have been against us, and in this way we should have made enemies of both.

"What I say is true," said the Captain. "Here is the ape, and the body of the servant whom he bit lies in a room upon the battlements. I ask for justice, O king, nothing more!"

As he said this he looked round the circle of courtiers, as if he were striving to find on the various faces some clue that might lead to the detection of the murderer. But search as he would, there was nothing to be seen there. At this point Lakwan Rao, the Prime Minister, interposed.

"By thy leave, O king," said he, "let this man produce the ape of which he speaks that we may see it for ourselves."

"That is good talk," said the rajah, a light coming into his beady eyes. "Produce the ape; we shall then be able to judge whence it came."

The Captain smiled grimly. He saw what was intended, but he was not to be caught with so shallow a trick.

"If Lakwan Rao desires to see the creature, let him undo the basket for himself," replied he. "Am I the Prime Minister's servant that I should wait upon him?"

The individual in question stepped back somewhat hastily, I thought, while his master

glared at the Captain even more fixedly than before. There was an uncomfortable silence, in which the men standing behind the throne held their heads down as they waited for what would happen next. What the result would have been I am not able to say. As it was, the monkey decided the matter for himself. Having bitten and torn away one side of the basket, he was able to thrust out his head. To enlarge the hole thus made so that his body might pass through was the work of a moment, and then he was out and loose in the room. The rajah jumped from his chair, while the courtiers scattered in all directions.

If they had affected to disbelieve the story of the beast's poisoned teeth, they, at least, gave sufficient proof that their doubts were capable of undergoing a change. Trained as he had doubtless been to run to the man nearest him, the monkey sprang upon a priest who was standing on the right-hand side of the throne. The man endeavoured to throw him off, but he only clung the tighter. He struck him, and immediately the animal fastened his teeth in his shoulder. With a wild cry the man at last dislodged him, and then staggered against the wall, while the monkey, grateful inasmuch as he had obtained his freedom at

last, fled through the open door into the courtyard beyond. Then there fell upon such as were left in the room a silence which was only broken by the heavy breathing of the priest, who still leant against the wall and knew that his doom was sealed.

"Thou hast seen, O king," cried the Captain in a low voice, but one that could be distinctly heard across the room; "now it is time to tell whether my words were true. The priest is bitten and, almost before thou canst say that he ails, the end will have come."

It was even as he said, for almost as soon as he had finished speaking the wretched man had fallen to the ground. In ten minutes he was no longer able to recognise those about him, and, as had been the case with poor Ram Dass, in half an hour he was lying stretched out upon the floor quite dead.

"This shall be looked to," cried the king. "Ye are the guests of my house, and the man who did this thing shall surely die. When he said that the ape was sent you by my orders he lied, and his tongue shall be pulled out by the roots. By the tombs of my ancestors it shall be even as I say."

He called Lakwan Rao to his side.

"Let my word be sent abroad," said he,

" in order that it may be discovered who hath done this thing. Be he who he may, he hath blackened my face, and by the word of a rajah, he shall be punished."

I watched the Prime Minister's countenance while his Highness spoke, and saw a startled look come into his eyes. This told its own tale as plainly as any words.

" Lakwan Rao will not have to travel very far in order to find the culprit," said I to myself. " If I am not mistaken, 'tis as we suspected; he knows more about it than he cares to say."

The Prime Minister promised compliance with the king's desires, and retired to give the necessary orders.

" Every endeavour shall be made to discover the culprit," said the king, addressing my companion. " If he is in the Palace, he shall be brought before me, and I will deal with him even as I say."

The Captain expressed his deep sense of gratitude; and then, not desiring to appear to dwell too long upon the matter, he craved permission to set to work on the enrolling of his army forthwith. Pleased to do anything that would extricate him from his present difficulty, the king willingly consented; and,

having gained our point, we retired, feeling that, if we had not altogether succeeded in teaching our enemies a lesson, we had at least shown them that we were not to be injured with impunity. The dead priest upon the floor was a good proof of this.

In the forenoon of the same day the work of enrolling the recruits commenced. From the moment that his Highness's decision went abroad, the courtyards of the Palace were filled with men anxious to take service under his banner. It was then that the real genius of the Captain became apparent. The man was a born commander of men. It was in his power to turn the roughest material to account, and to inspire so great a feeling of confidence in so doing, that it would require a larger force than was ever likely to be brought against it to shake it, when it was once firmly established. Anxious though I was to render him all the assistance in my power, there was little I could do; yet what I lacked in knowledge, I am inclined to believe I made up in enthusiasm. It was impossible to work under the man without being affected by this feeling. Day after day the labour continued, and day after day saw some new difficulty smoothed over or swept away. After much

opposition on the part of the king and the various functionaries of the Palace, a portion of the great building was placed at our disposal, to be used for casting cannon and the various other requisites of an arsenal. Here a number of picked workmen were taught the manufacture of fire-arms, and with such success that, before two months had elapsed, one of the battalions was fully equipped in this respect. If they were not quite equal to the European standard, they were at least sufficiently useful to enable them to take the field. It was a gigantic undertaking, for more reasons than one; but the Captain knew no such thing as fear or failure, and every rebuff only seemed to add to his determination to succeed. Had the little lawyer seen him then, he would have inclined more than ever to the belief that he was a strange man. Strange he certainly was, and in many extraordinary and unsuspected ways. By dint of threatening, cajoling, encouraging or discouraging as he thought best suited to the matter in hand, he managed to accomplish things which other men, less gifted, would have set aside without a second thought as impossible. And, stranger still, it was noticeable that everyone who was brought in contact with him became,

after a brief interval, a participator in his zeal. Yet, contradict it who will, the man's greatest weakness lay in himself. 'Twas his inordinate vanity, his braggadocio, and what might almost be called his childish impetuosity, that nearly brought about his ruin on more than one occasion. He would labour through the scorching days and nights without cessation; would plot and plan, build up and condemn, erect and pull down with equal impartiality; and at the end, when you would have thought him a rock that nothing could move, that no human weakness could affect, you would find him fretting his heart out to find an opportunity of revenging himself upon a man who had omitted a salute, had turned his back upon him in Durbar, or committed one of those little trivial acts of incivility which are as unintentional as they are beneath the notice of a man. Then it would be my task to argue with him and endeavour to console him, to pacify him as one would an angry child, being careful always not to permit him to suppose that I deemed him in the wrong, or thought the worse of him for being so prone to take offence. Surely never in the history of mankind has there been a more complex character, or one more difficult to understand, than that

of Captain Aloysius O'Rourke. On one side of the picture we have a fire-eater of the most determined description, a martinet and disciplinarian, a leader of men second to none, one who could discriminate impartially between the intentional act of insubordination and that which was the outcome of momentary forgetfulness; a fighter without knowledge of fear, a man of iron for whom no hardship was too severe and no task too great. On the other, we find a man who could rule men and not his own temper; who could face death cheerfully himself, yet for others fear it like a coward; a man to whom war was as the breath of his nostrils, yet who could be melted to tears by a tale of sorrow or a tender song. A remarkable man, truly, in every sense of the word, and one who, under happier circumstances, should have risen to a great height in the history of the world.

CHAPTER IX

AFTER the events described in the previous chapter, we were permitted to live our lives with less fear of treachery than we had hitherto done. Our enemies had received a lesson they were scarcely likely to forget; and bearing in mind the fact that the king, if he had by no means sided with us, was at least so well inclined toward us that he would not openly do us harm, they, on their side, were not disposed for the present to treat us with any real hostility. From morning until night our time was fully occupied. There were recruits to be enrolled, stores to be served and purchased, officers to be instructed in their duties, regiments to be drilled, and all the work of fitting out a new army to be gone through day by day. To give satisfaction in all this, particularly when the men with whom we had to deal were of an alien race and tongue, was by no means easy; the labour was incessant and the anxiety unceasing. Each morning saw us eager for the work in hand,

and each night thankful to have proceeded so far in its accomplishment. Fortunately 'twas for the most part a labour of love. The men proved themselves worthy of the trust we reposed in them; coming as they did of a race of soldiers, it was their natural calling, and they wanted no other. Indeed, it was wonderful what improvements were effected by the Captain, to whom all the credit was due. By the time he had been three months at the work, the change he had wrought in the men was such as would scarcely be believed. By dint of persuasion, sometimes by the employment of force, often by threatening, he raised them from a band of undisciplined levies to something approaching the level of a European army. Even the king himself, when he had witnessed their orderliness in the field, could not refrain from praise. However firmly he might have been wedded to the old state of things that in Jahlmeer had endured almost since the beginning of time—the wild cavalry charge, the fierce rush upon the foe, and the victory which often came perilously near a defeat—he could scarcely have failed to see the advantage of the new state of things. At the same time, his pride and his native obstinacy would not permit him to bestow

the credit where it was due. An innate jealousy of The O'Rourke was at the root of all this, and do what we might we could not rid him of it. That he had no idea of the plot we were hatching against himself we felt certain; nevertheless, there were times when I was afraid for the future. Even with the Captain's power of organization, his mastery of detail, his capability in imparting zeal to those about him, I must confess I had my fears as to his power of keeping a secret. More than once he had come within an ace of letting the cat slip from the bag, when he himself was warmed with liquor, and some of the rajah's ministers were in our company. This fault, if by that word I may describe it, lay, I am convinced, in a desire for sympathy. With him it was only necessary for a person to show a feeling of affection for him and to profess an interest in his affairs, for the warm-hearted fellow to unburden his mind of all his hopes, aspirations, and fears, confident that his trust would not be abused. And now, with our plans at this stage, I must turn to my own more immediate concerns.

It must not be supposed that since the day I had fought the tiger in the courtyard of the Palace, and by so doing had received the good

opinion of his Highness, I had not thought of the beautiful face I had seen looking out at me from the window. On the contrary, that face had scarcely been absent from my thoughts. There had been a witchery in it, a laughing challenge in the eyes, that had taken possession of my senses, so that, when I thought of woman, it was not of Cicely who was lost to me, but of this mysterious she behind the curtain. Try how I would, remembering always the dangerous position in which we stood with the rajah and his world, I could not shake it off. Who the owner of the face was, and how it came about that she had singled me out for her favour, I was not able to understand. It is sufficient, as I have admitted, that the remembrance of it was always with me; when drilling our troops upon the field, when playing *pachisi* with his Highness in the courtyard (in which manner he had once or twice honoured me), while discussing our position with the Captain, but more often than either in my dreams at night. Had the rajah suspected my attachment for a moment, my shift would have been a short one; but, since the woman and I had never spoken, save with our eyes, 'twas not likely he would discover anything. That I was anxious to see

more of her I can not deny; youth is ever susceptible to feminine beauty, and 'twould have proved a marvellous thing indeed had I proved different to my fellow-men. And here it is necessary that I should tell how we first became acquainted. If the record seems a strange one, let it always be borne in mind that we were in a strange land, where the customs are vastly different to our own.

'Twas toward the end of a monstrous hot day, the greater part of which I had spent with a squadron of cavalry on the dusty plain beyond the city, that I returned to the Palace and surrendered my charger to the care of a groom in the courtyard. The troops were making such excellent progress that I was well pleased with the part I was playing in their education. This may in some measure have accounted for my exalted state of mind as I tramped under the great frescoes of the wall toward the new quarters which his Highness had been generously pleased to bestow upon us. To reach them, it was necessary that I should pass beneath the window which I have in another place described. The sickly smell of the Palace came out to me, that indescribable perfume which carried with it such an air of mystery. Down in the yard the

tigers bayed and the elephants trumpeted; a peacock was preening himself upon the fretted stonework of the gate; while a horde of monkeys were playing in a pipal tree that overhung the well. Then, as I passed beneath a latticed window, many feet above my head, a strange thing happened. I was thinking of the day when I had fought the tiger in this very yard, and was picturing the face I had seen looking out at me from the window overhead, when the tinkle of a woman's bracelets greeted my ear. I stopped immediately and looked up. But all I could see was a tiny hand parting the grasses of the blind. A moment later the sound of splashing water reached me, and a small jet fell upon the pavement at my feet. I had scarcely time to notice this, when a little bunch of green stuff was thrown out and fell like the water upon the stones before me. Then the blind was drawn once more, and I was alone. Marvelling as to the reason of this curious affair, I stooped and picked the leaves up. It was a pretty fancy, and consisted of a single leaf of myrtle, another of pomegranate, and one small shred of palm. The latter was tied midway with a golden thread; but what it was meant to convey to my mind I could not for

the life of me understand. Still wondering, I crossed the courtyard and made my way to our quarters, where I found the Captain awaiting me. An air of mystery sat upon him, and I could see that he had been awaiting my coming with considerable impatience. On my arrival, we spoke for a few moments on the matters of the day and the ill-temper of the rajah in the morning, then as to the progress the men under my command were making. The new regiments were falling into order even better than we had expected, and their success encouraged The O'Rourke to believe more implicitly than ever in the ultimate success of the plans he had arranged.

"They can not miscarry," said he. "War with the Marwats is only a matter of time. If I can only persuade his Highness to fall in with my views, all will be well. Then will come our turn, and after that 'twill not be long before we shall have built up an army that will be invincible and with which we shall dominate all India."

Knowing him so well, and being accustomed to his belief in his own infallibility, I was able to make a proper allowance for this outburst of enthusiasm. I knew that his boasts were in a sense greater than his confi-

dence, and that, in order to satisfy the one, he was exacting tribute from the other. There was a silence for a few moments after he had finished his harangue, during which he looked at me a little anxiously, as if he hoped to receive my praise, and was scarcely satisfied because it was not forthcoming.

"Something is troubling you to-night," he said. "Tell me, what is it?"

In reality I was thinking of the woman and the message I had received, for a message I was convinced it was.

"I can not help feeling sorry that you have taken Bagh Sing into your confidence," I answered, making use of the first excuse that occurred to me.

"And why should I not have done so?" he inquired, with some little asperity, for he was ever impatient of criticism or contradiction. "The man is ours heart and soul. On that I will pledge my word. What have you to say against him?"

"I have nothing to say against him," I replied, and I knew this to be the truth, though I had an uneasy suspicion in my heart that he was not so trustworthy as we hoped. "I can not help thinking, nevertheless, that it would have been more prudent had we kept

our own counsel, at all events, for some little time to come."

"But the man can be useful to us," he returned, as if he were anxious to convince me against his own better judgment.

It is possible, my dear reader, that you may be familiar with the curious feeling that takes possession of a man when he is aware that his friend is conscious of having committed an indiscretion, and, while being anxious to atone for the same, fights to retain some remnant of what he considers to be his dignity? 'Twas so with the Captain at that moment. I was well aware that Bagh Sing had chanced upon him at an untoward moment, and by means of that very Oriental subtlety, which the Captain could warn me against, yet not see himself, had wormed out of him the information that he otherwise would never have obtained.

"I will stand for Bagh Sing's honesty with my life," the Captain repeated, and at the moment he meant it. "The man has suffered innumerable wrongs at Pertab Sing's hands, and he is bound by ties of blood to the rightful heir. 'Tis sorrowful I am that you should think I have acted wrongly in the matter."

I began at once to regret that I had said

anything and to make excuses for my action. Far better for both of us would it have been had I persisted in my line of argument, and have induced him to look at matters from my point of view. Man, however, is never knowingly master of his fate, and certainly I was not of mine.

"Do as you please," said I, taking his hand and holding it in my own. "Whatever course you decide to adopt, will be right so far as I am concerned. Lead on; I am content to follow you in everything."

He dropped my hand and walked a few paces away. I saw his shoulders quiver, and I knew that the gallant heart was making more than a due allowance for my surrender. When he returned, he placed his hand upon my shoulder and looked into my face with kindly eyes.

"Dear lad," said he, and his voice was as soft and sweet as the music of a flute, "'tis a fool I am, and my folly will be answerable for any trouble we may fall into. If Bagh Sing proves a traitor, 'twill be my fault for trusting him. Yet I can not help feeling that you are wrong in doubting him."

I could have hugged him for the generosity he displayed toward the fellow; never-

theless, since our very lives depended upon his carefulness, I felt that I was justified in asking something more than generosity from him. As it was, I was placed in an unenviable position. While I was in reality the junior partner of the firm, I was yet being called upon to take my share of the senior partner's risks. Danger was nothing to me, but the Captain's safety was of vital consequence. Apart from what my own position would be, should any ill befall him, the man had taken a great hold upon my heart, and I was in no wise prepared to allow him to become the victim of his own good nature. One thing I could plainly see, and that was that he had not yet told me everything. Presently, however, the truth came out.

"Though you may not be aware of it," said he, "we are well-nigh at the end of our resources. The money I managed to screw out of the king is nearly gone. That being so, 'tis high time we should act. The troops are well-nigh ready to our hand, and, to keep them steady, work must be found for them. If 'tis to be war with the Marwats so much the better; if not, then our plot must come to a head at once, and we must strike while we can!"

"And how do you propose to do this?" I inquired.

"That is exactly what I want to say to you," he answered, after a momentary pause. "And I want you to pay particular heed to my words. I have arranged that, as soon as 'tis dark to-night, a horse shall be waiting beyond the city for me. Come what may, I must reach the castle of Markpaur, see the guardian of the boy, make my arrangements with him in preparation for a general rising, and be back again before dawn."

"'Tis impossible," I replied. "You can not do it. Remember 'tis fully forty miles to Markpaur."

"If it were a hundred I must cover it," he replied, with the dogged determination so characteristic of him. "As a matter of fact, 'tis barely forty miles, and I have arranged that a fresh horse shall await me midway. Should fortune favour me, I shall be there by eleven o'clock and back here again by three."

"And how am I to help you?" I asked.

"You must help me to descend the wall and to climb it again," he answered. "It is impossible for me to leave by the main gates of the Palace. Somebody would tell the king, and his suspicions would then be aroused."

I willingly agreed to do as he asked, but not before I had stated my wish that he should let me go in his stead. He shook his head, however.

"Nay, 'tis imperative that I should go myself," he replied. "I must sound them as to their intentions and assure myself of their loyalty."

After that nothing more was to be said.

As I have told you, our quarters, since we had undertaken the formation of the new army, had been changed, and we were now located near the courtyard where the elephants had fought, and I had had my memorable encounter with the tiger. Like our old quarters, these were on the Palace walls, at a corner, one side being land and the other water. For this reason it was possible for an active man, provided he was assisted by someone on the wall above, to leave the castle at night, under cover of darkness, and to return again with but small fear of being observed. This was exactly what the Captain intended doing. Having walked along the battlements, we examined the place and satisfied ourselves that it would answer our requirements. Then we stood looking across the lake to where the women's palace lay, as

if afloat on the water. A more beautiful picture could scarcely be imagined, and we were still gazing at it when enlightenment came to me concerning the little bit of green stuff I still carried in my pocket. I looked around me at the Palace and the barren hills beyond. The country of Jahlmeer is desolation itself; indeed, the only foliage to be seen in the district is that which grows upon the island in the lake. There myrtle and pomegranate grew luxuriantly, while a single palm reared his graceful head above them. If I were not mistaken, the whole message, for message I was sure it was, was now as plain as daylight. The sprinkle of water that had splashed the stones at my feet was intended to typify the lake; the green stuff betokened the island, and, since the palm leaf was especially singled out for notice, being bound midway with the gold thread, it was evident that it played an important part in the affair. That it had been thrown to me by a woman was plain, first by reason of the place whence it came, and next by the chinking of the bracelets I had heard. Moreover, who but a woman would have thought of such a thing? A thrill of delight ran through me as I reflected that my correspondent might be the woman I had seen at

the window. Was it possible that she desired to speak with me? The very thought of such a thing was sufficient to destroy all thoughts of prudence; then I remembered Cicely, and a feeling of shame took possession of me. Was I substituting another in her place? And yet, I argued with myself, why should I feel ashamed? What was she to me? Nothing! She was lost to me forever? Had she not thrown me over in order to marry a wealthier man? 'Twould be better, far better, that I should forget her altogether. All this time the Captain had been leaning his hands upon the parapet, looking across the lake, wrapped in thought. I inquired the subject of his meditations.

"I was thinking of the future," said he, more than half to himself. "I was thinking of what might be made of this kingdom by capable hands. But will those hands be capable of so great a work? Would it not be better to confine one's self to shaking the Pagoda tree, and to filling our pockets, to let them go on, torturing and oppressing, robbing and maiming, as they have been doing these hundreds of years. Do you know, Charles, I have a presentiment that this place will set the seal upon my fate?"

He had scarcely spoken before there was a crash, a sliding noise, and a moment later a great rock, looking like a portion of the hill out of which that side of the castle was carved, came bounding from the battlements above, missed us by what seemed a hair's breadth, and then fell splash into the lake. We examined the heights above us, but not a soul was to be seen there. It was a narrow escape we had had. If the Captain had not turned to speak to me, and in so doing had moved a step to his left, nothing could have saved him.

"Egad! they're beginning their old tricks again, are they?" said he, as coolly as if the matter were of the smallest importance. "I wish I could understand why they do it? Perhaps it's their idea of keeping accounts. I complained to the king to-day that the pay of the troop was in arrears, and threatened to leave him to his own devices if the sum is not immediately forthcoming. It may be they think if they kill me the men will be afraid to ask for what they are entitled to. They little know them. In their present temper there would be a mutiny in a week, and the rajah would be with his ancestors in a fortnight. Though he would be the last to

admit it, he is fully aware that the safety of his throne depends upon me. But he does not know that upon me depends also the length of time he is to occupy it. As things are now, it may be even shorter than I suppose. However, let us return to our own quarters without further delay. We want no more rolling stones. The next may be more successful."

We did as he suggested, and, until it was dark, occupied ourselves in discussing the affairs of the army and the State.

As Good Fortune had it, the night was dark and cloudy, so that, when the time arrived for the Captain to set out, there was little likelihood of his being observed.

" Do not forget to be ready to pull me up again," he whispered, as he bade me farewell. " Should I by any chance not return by daylight you know exactly how to proceed. If I do not return at all allow a day to pass, then seize your opportunity and make your own escape. It would be useless for you to attempt to manage affairs here alone."

" You must come back," I answered vehemently. " For Heaven's sake, man, run no more risks than you can help. I shall be in a fever until I see you again."

With that I lowered him down the wall

by means of a rope. Then, when he had reached the bottom, he waved his hand to me and disappeared into the darkness. I stood looking after him for a few moments, and then returned to our quarters to consider what I should do. It was as yet too early for me to think of setting off on my adventure, so I occupied myself as best I could with my own thoughts until the Palace should be silent and I deemed it safe to venture out. That afternoon, when taking stock of the situation, I had observed a rough native boat moored to the wall near to the great gates through which the water of the lake was admitted into the ditch in time of war. To reach the boat would prove a somewhat difficult undertaking, but, by fastening the rope to the top of the gate, I fancied it could be accomplished. At any rate I resolved to make the attempt. When I had satisfied myself that my movements were not likely to be observed, I made my way along the battlements until I stood above the little craft. Then, having made my rope secure to the post of the gate, I let myself down until I stood safely in her. She was only a frail cockle-shell at best, but, such as she was, she answered my purpose as well, if not better, than the finest State barge could

have done. When I had released her I took up the paddles and turned her head toward the centre of the lake. With my heart beating hopefully in my breast, I paddled on, every minute drawing nearer to the island, until I could distinguish the outlines of the various buildings it contained. Not a light was to be seen upon it, however, nor in any part of the great Palace behind me. My little craft made no sound, but cut her way through the water as silently and as swiftly as a swan. When I had reached the nearest point of the island I stopped to examine my position, for it was necessary to proceed with the utmost caution. Having satisfied myself, I paddled softly along the shore in search of the single palm tree, where, if any success was to attend my adventure, I was confident I should discover it. At last it came into view beside a white marble summer-house, the fretted balcony of which was so low that it well-nigh touched the water. It was an exciting moment, and I could scarce contain my impatience. The only sound to be heard was the lapping of the little waves against the stonework and the rustling of the night wind in the palm branches above my head. Then, as if to show me that I was not alone, the chink-

ing of a bracelet reached my ears from the summer-house. In order to make sure that I had not been mistaken, I drew a little closer to the balustrading and peered inside. At first I could see nothing, save the dim outline of the summer-house itself; then a woman's form, clad in white from head to foot, glided softly toward me.

"Hush!" she whispered; "be silent, for 'tis death for both of us should we be discovered. 'Tis certain that you read my message aright; otherwise you would not be here. Yet they say the wits of men are not so keen as those of women!"

Her voice was as soft as the note of a flute, and in the starlight I could see that the little hand resting upon the balcony was perfect in its shape and beauty. I asked her, since she had sent for me, what service I could render her!

"It was my desire to warn you," she answered, still in a whisper. "The king is not well disposed toward you or your big friend, the man who played with the wrestlers as if they had been children. I saw you kill the tiger, and I would not have so brave a man go to his death when there is no need. You have many enemies in the Palace, of whom

Lakwan Rao is not the least. 'Twas he who sent you the ape with the poisoned teeth; 'twas he who gave the orders for the throwing of the knife and the rolling of the stone this very day. Bagh Sing I hate also."

I had always felt certain of the former, but her confirmation of my suspicions concerning the latter caused me some surprise. The Prime Minister, as we were aware, had disliked us from the beginning. We had come between him and his influence over the rajah, and, in consequence, had upset many of his most cherished plans. It was scarcely likely that he would be willing either to forget or to forgive.

"How does it happen that you are aware of these things?" I inquired, for the extent of her knowledge puzzled me.

"Behind the curtain everything is known," she answered. "We hear, but 'tis seldom we can speak."

As I discovered later, nothing happens in an Indian palace, however trifling, but it becomes a subject for talk among the women folk, and the rajah's household was no exception to the rule.

"Whence come ye into Jahlmeer?" she

asked, after a little pause. "I knew not that there were such men in Hindustan."

I told her, but my description of the country across the sea could have conveyed very little to her, for she shook her head.

"I have seen no water, but this lake," said she. "How, therefore, should I know what you call great seas?"

In a whisper, though 'twas wasting precious time, I tried to tell her, but she shook her head. It was too great a thing for one who had seen nothing but the life behind the curtain to understand.

"If, as you say, you come from across the great water, go back while you have time," she continued. "Your lives are no longer safe here. Nay, do not doubt me, for I know it to be true. As soon as you have finished the work you have set out to do, the rajah will try to kill you."

"It may be as you say," I answered. "At any rate rest certain we shall find means to defend ourselves."

"You are a brave man, that I know," she said, "but what can two do against so many? 'Tis not a single tiger you will have to fight then, but a hundred, thirsty for your blood.

'Tis hopeless to think that you could overcome them."

"Nevertheless, 'tis kind of you to warn me of my danger, and I am very grateful."

As I said this I stood up in the boat and lifted her hand from where it lay upon the marble balustrading, and, putting it to my lips, kissed it softly. She drew it away, but not as though she were displeased.

"Now I have given you my message," said she; "go, and may you profit by my advice!"

"I will go—but by your leave I will return again."

"Nay, nay," she answered, "'twould not be safe."

As she said it, however, whether by accident or design, her veil fell from her face, and I saw that it was the face of the woman who had looked at me from the window.

"Take pity on me, and let me come again," I implored, still holding her hand.

"Nay," she answered, "'tis not for such a man as thou to crave a woman's pity. 'Tis for man to command, for woman to obey. If 'tis thy wish to see me again, I will send thee a sign to let thee know when it may be. Do nothing until then. Should it be discovered that I have spoken face to face with thee,

nothing can save us both from death. Now farewell. 'Tis growing late, and there are curious eyes ever spying upon the Queen."

"The Queen?" I whispered, in awed surprise, for until that moment I had no idea of her rank in the Palace.

"Ay," said she, "I am Pudmini, the Queen, and what is thy name? Tell it to me."

I told her, and she spoke the word after me. Then, once more bidding me be cautious, she slipped away, and, almost before I knew she was gone, had vanished into the dark.

"Pudmini, the Queen!" said I to myself, "Pudmini, the Queen!" The name hung upon my lips like the sound of daintiest music.

Then, seeing that it was no use my remaining longer where I was, I turned the boat's head and paddled softly back across the strip of water that separated the Women's Palace from the island. Fortunately for me, everything was as I had left it, and, when I reached the gate again, and had made the boat secure, I drew myself up to the battlements once more. Then, taking the rope with me for use when the Captain should return, I made my way back to my own quarters to think over the strange events of the evening.

Little thought did I bestow upon the warning the Queen had given me. My brain was filled with the remembrance of her face and the music of her voice. "Pudmini, the Queen! Pudmini, the Queen!" I said to myself times out of number, and the words rang in my ear like the chiming of bells.

At last it was time for me to prepare for the Captain's home-coming. I accordingly took the rope, which had already stood us both in such good stead, and went out upon the wall. The stars were still shining, and so far there was no sign of dawn. I knew, however, that it could not be long before it made its appearance. Seating myself on the coping of the wall, I waited with what patience I could command. Half an hour went by, then an hour, but still the Captain did not come. His continued absence began to cause me some concern, which, as time went on, and still there was no sign of him, was destined to develop into genuine alarm. One by one the stars paled in the East; if he did not come soon, he could scarcely fail to be discovered. I rose and paced the battlements, stopping every now and then to listen for his step. What excuse was I to make to the rajah, should he learn that the Captain had left the Palace dur-

ing the night? If suspicion once took root in the latter's brain, the plot we had been industriously hatching for so long would fall to pieces like a house of sand. Then, suddenly, but oh, with what happiness, my ears caught the sound of a man running. I gazed in the direction whence it proceeded, but, for a few moments, could see nothing of the man I wanted. Then, to my joy, the Captain came into view. A second later he was beneath me, the rope had dropped to his feet, and I was giving him my assistance to climb the wall. We were only just in time, for when we reached our quarters once more, a new day had begun.

"Heaven be thanked you have come back," I said, almost fiercely. "You will never know what a fright you have given me. I had quite made up my mind that some accident had befallen you, and that the rajah would discover everything. Why were you so long?"

"For the reason that one of my horses broke down," he answered. "I do not wonder at it, for the poor brute had a heavy weight to carry. So fast did I ride that the other dropped exhausted when I left his back."

"And now what news have you to tell me?" I inquired anxiously. "Is the Rawat of Marpaur prepared to help us?"

"More willing than prepared, I fancy," he answered. "The young prince is well, but still in hiding. As soon as I give the word they will produce him, and directly Pertab Sing is my prisoner, he will be placed upon the throne. In the meantime, they are to abide the course of events and await the signal from me. And now for another day's work; 'tis too late for sleep."

With that, the man, who had spent the night riding and conspiring, who had taxed human endurance to the uttermost, removed the dust of travel and began to prepare himself for the business of the day with as little concern as if he had spent the night upon his bed in slumber. I followed his example, and then, mounting the horses that were awaiting us in the courtyard, we set off across the plain to the spot where the troops were drawn up awaiting us. As we went, I looked across the lake at the White Palace with a new interest. I could see the summer-house where I had met the Queen, with the single palm raising its graceful head above it. From it I looked at the long rows of stalwart troopers,

the battalions of well-drilled infantry, and the gunners of the artillery, then at the huge figure of The O'Rourke, to whose efforts this grand result was due. As I did so, I thought of the day that might come when I—but at this moment, to the accompaniment of blaring of trumpets and the beating of drums, the rajah, accompanied by his principal nobles, rode from the Palace to inspect us. There was a look of malignant satisfaction on his face as he gazed upon the work of our hands, yet he would have been a close observer who could have found in the words of praise he bestowed upon the Captain any trace of the bitter hatred that we knew was gnawing at his heart. The review at an end, the Captain and I rode back to the city together. I noticed that he was silent and preoccupied; but, remembering how much he had upon his mind, I forebore to interrupt his meditations. We had arrived at the last steep ascent to the Palace gates when he spoke.

"Though the rajah spoke so fair to me just now, I can not help feeling there is something wrong," he said, shaking his head solemnly. "If only I could tell what it is. His words are all honey, but his thoughts are as bitter as gall. I must discuss the matter with

Bagh Sing and bid him discover, if possible, the reason of the change."

"Once more I say I do not trust Bagh Sing," I replied, speaking this time on the information I had received from the Queen. "He pretends to be friendly to us, but how are we to know that he has not betrayed us to the king?"

He looked at me sharply.

"Why should you think that he would be likely to betray us?" he inquired.

I remembered what the Queen had said to me, but I could not tell the Captain that. It was the first thing I had kept from him since I had known him; but the Queen's secret was sacred to me. In after days, when the red-hot fingers of remorse were tearing at my heart strings, the remembrance of this secrecy was destined to add doubly to my pain. I put him off, therefore, by declaring that it was my firm conviction that the man was false to us.

"Time will prove that," said the Captain quietly. "For the present, let us trust that you are wrong."

No more was said upon the subject then; but for the remainder of the day I had the uneasy conviction, always present with me, that I had failed in my duty to the man I loved.

CHAPTER X

DESPITE the Captain's fear that the rajah was planning some sinister move against us, the next few days went by without anything untoward happening. The feud, which had existed between the tributary State of Marwat and Jahlmeer, was, after a rest of more than five years, beginning to come to life once more. The tribute which had never been paid willingly was now not forthcoming, and Pertab Sing, flushed with pride in his new army, was eager to march against the enemy in order to enforce his rights.

"Here is the opportunity ready to our hands," said the Captain, when we had discussed the situation together. "A properly conducted war, not lasting too long, would be just what is wanted to blood the army, and by restoring the king's confidence in our administration would permit us more time to continue our preparations for the great work. 'Tis, however, a desperate risk to run. The troops will be fighting in a way they have

never done before; and should disaster befall us, it may require all our power and influence over them to prevent them from resorting to their old tactics—in which case Pertab Sing's favour will be entirely gone, and our downfall will be complete."

That afternoon a grand Durbar was held in the king's Audience Chamber, at which the rajah himself, the Prime Minister, and all the great nobles of the State were present. Important news had arrived to the effect that the enemy had crossed the border, and the king was eager for immediate action. His fiery Rajput blood boiled within him, and 'twould have needed but the smallest encouragement to have induced him to take the field at the head of his army. The Captain, however, urged upon him the necessity of doing nothing of the kind. I could see from the expression about his mouth that, if there were going to be war and his troops were to be engaged, The O'Rourke was determined to have the handling of them in his own way. This policy, as may be supposed, was far from commending itself to the king; and the nobles, seeing how things stood, hastened to take their cue from him.

"Am I a baseborn that I should tarry

while my honour is at stake?" cried his Highness, every hair of his beard bristling with rage. "If that is the advice of the leader of my army, 'twould be better to return to the fighting of olden days. We Rajputs, at least, do not fear to go forward."

The sneer cut the Captain like a knife. I looked at his face and saw his mouth twitching, and the light of anger growing in his eyes. Another moment, and, regardless of consequences, he would have crushed the calumny down the other's throat. Then we should have put our backs to the wall, and have fought till we were cut down. Fortunately, however, I was able to place my hand upon his arm unnoticed by the others. The touch calmed him immediately, and recalled the necessity that existed for caution.

"I have spoken," he said simply, "and 'tis now for your Highness to give your commands."

"'Tis my command that you slay these dogs," the rajah replied. "March against them and show no mercy."

We thereupon left the Council Chamber and proceeded to the barracks, where The O'Rourke called his officers together. There it was settled that at daybreak the army should

take the field and march against the rebel forces with as much speed as possible. No mother could have been more eager to watch her child's first steps, than was the Captain to witness the behaviour of his troops upon the field of battle. Nor was I behind him in that respect. The native officers emulated our enthusiasm, which again was reflected in the conduct of the men.

"Yet," said the Captain to me, as we sat together in our quarters afterward, "there is something behind it all that I can not understand. What the rajah has in mind I know not; but I can safely promise him this: that if it is an act of treachery, I will pluck him out of his Palace and hang him on his battlements, if I have to do it with my own hands. In the meantime 'tis war, glorious war, so let there be no repining in the camp."

He spread his chest, and smote himself vigorously thereon. The roar of his voice and the familiar speech carried me back irresistibly to that day in the Fleet Prison when I had first met him. What strange adventures had we been through together since! Yet, from what I could see, there seemed to be still more exciting times ahead of us. Later in the afternoon it became necessary for

me to leave the Palace and to visit the barracks; dusk had already fallen when I returned.

Since the time we received orders to march against the enemy on the following morning, I had been thinking of the Queen, and wondering how 'twould be possible for me to see her again. I was still pondering this in my mind as I passed beneath the window which, by this time, was so familiar to me, when to my delight I heard once more the chink of bracelets, and a little later, a small bunch of green stuff, with the tiny palm leaf tied up as before, fluttered down and fell at my feet. Then the curtain was drawn back into its place and I saw and heard no more. I stooped and picked the little message up, and, when I had examined it, placed it in my pocket. With all my being I longed for the time to come when it would be possible for me to set out upon my journey. How slowly the time passed I must leave you to imagine. 'Tis enough to say that every minute seemed an hour, and every hour a year. At last, when the Captain was asleep, dreaming doubtless of the victories he was to win in the near future, I turned out and dressed myself. Then, taking with me the rope I had used on the previ-

ous occasion, I made my way down the battlements until I came to the water-gates to which the boat was moored. To let myself down into her, and to paddle quickly but quietly, toward the island, was a work soon accomplished, and presently I found myself drawing alongside the summer-house in which I had last seen the Queen. Cautiously and noiselessly I drew myself up beside the balustrading and looked about me for Pudmini. No sign of her, however, could I discover. With all the patience I could summon to my assistance, I set myself to await her coming, but upward of a quarter of an hour went by before I observed a white figure hastening along the path toward the summer-house.

"It was not in my power to come before," she whispered. "There has been a Nautch in the Palace to-night in honour of the coming war, and the king I fear distrusts me, and, indeed, there are those among my women who would permit no chance to escape them of doing me an injury."

"Then it is dangerous for you to be here," said I in a whisper. "Oh, why then did you come?"

"Because there are things I must say to thee," she answered confidentially, laying her

hand upon my arm. "I have discovered that the king has it in his mind that you and the great man, your companion, are none too well disposed toward him, and that you are in league with those who are anxious to place the son of Bijai Sing upon the throne. 'Tis Bagh Sing who has put these thoughts into his head."

It was certain then that Bagh Sing was a traitor. But the villain should have his deserts sooner or later. Of that I was determined. I drew a little nearer to her.

"And what would you say," I whispered, "if there should be truth in what they say and the king should be removed?"

"I should welcome the news," she answered quickly, and I could hear her catch her breath and could almost feel the beating of her heart. "'Twould be the sweetest tale that could be told in my ears. You know not how he has treated me."

"Nay, there is a sweeter tale yet to be told," said I, placing my arm round her and drawing her closer to me. "A tale so sweet that only hearts that love can understand it. Queen, thinkest thou 'twas chance that brought me all these weary miles to look upon thy beauty? Nay, nay, it was Fate, the

sweetest Fate that man could know. 'Twas Love! I am a man, Pudmini, and love thee, and would fight for thee against the world."

Heaven forgive me but more, then I took her in my arms and kissed her again and again until she slipped panting from my embrace.

"Nay," she said, "this must not be. You but jest with me when you say you love me. Is it not true that we have spoken together but twice in all our lives?"

"Yet heart spoke to heart," I answered. "Is it possible, then, that you have no love for me?"

She would not answer till I pressed her to confess.

"Thou art as merciless with me as with the tiger," she replied. "Yet it is even as thou sayest; happen what may, my heart is in thy keeping."

For her I would have fought all the gods and men of Hindustan, and, rather than not have held her in my arms, would even have considered myself fortunate had I lost my life in the struggle. There was but one Pudmini, and now that Cicely was lost, she was the only woman in existence for me. Never before had Jahlmeer seemed so pleasant to me; ambition, the world, and all else was

forgotten in the love I had come to possess for her. Yet, as these thoughts passed through my brain, I could see the great Palace opposite, standing out clearly defined against the starlit sky, as if in warning. It told me that it was necessary to think for her as well as for myself. Though I could have tarried forever, the time had come when I was compelled to bid her farewell. I spoke of the war for which I was to leave at daybreak, and thereafter it was difficult to induce her to withdraw her arms from about my neck. She clung to me, weeping, vowing that she would leave the Palace at any hazard and follow me to the field of battle. Oh, if I had only been free, how willingly would I have formed a plan and have borne her off, out of the State and to a place of safety, where she would have been beyond the reach of the king, her master. But it was impossible! Loving her as I did, I must leave her to the tender mercies of a man who I was convinced not only distrusted her, but who, hating me, would wreak his vengeance on her, should he chance to discover that she loved me.

I raised the weeping face from my shoulder and looked into the dark, lustrous eyes.

"My queen," said I, "though my heart is torn in doing so, 'tis time for me to leave thee. We march at daybreak, and there is much that must be done ere then."

She only sobbed in reply.

Once more I bade her farewell, but she clung even tighter to me than before.

"I can not let thee go from me," she whispered. "Thou dost not know how dear thou art to me. Should'st thou be killed, my life will end also."

"Nay, nay," I answered, "thou must not say such things; I shall return with haste and honour. And, moreover, when the time that is appointed shall have arrived, and he who now holds thee a prisoner shall have gone his way, thou shalt be mine and mine only, let men say what they will."

She shook her head.

"The gods have told a different tale to me," she said. "I have inquired my fate of the stars and it hath been revealed to me. Is it possible to dispute that which they have ordained?"

"I would dispute it with them to the end of time," I replied, though she shivered a little at my blasphemy. "If but a hair of thy head is injured when I return, the king himself shall

answer for it. This I swear by thy sweet eyes and our love."

Then, disengaging myself from her embrace, I returned to the steps leading to the water, with the intention of entering my boat. A terrible surprise was in store for me, however. Instead of finding it awaiting me where I had left it, it was not to be seen. It may be that in my hurry I had neglected to fasten the rope securely; one thing at least was certain, the boat was gone. For a moment I stood upon the steps, well-nigh beside myself with anxiety, not knowing how to act. Pudmini had followed me and had become aware of what had happened almost as soon as I knew it myself. When she saw the vacant place where it had been she uttered a little cry of alarm and, for a moment, clutched at the marble rail as if she were about to swoon. I took her in my arms and carried her back into the summer-house. For both our sakes it was imperative that she should utter no sound. What I was to do I could not tell.

As I have already said, I was no swimmer, therefore the easiest and surest means of escape was denied me. I cudgelled my brains, but could think of nothing. A night bird

called from across the still water as we waited, but his cry brought no enlightenment to me. All we could tell each other was that, when day should break, I would be found on the island and from that moment Pudmini would be a dead woman; for, as we both knew, if it were discovered that she had been with me, her death was certain. Rather than let that happen I vowed I would throw myself into the lake and allow my body to bear what interpretation it pleased when it should be discovered. Against this, however, there was to be set the Captain. To do as I proposed would be to desert him, and to throw even more suspicion upon him than existed already. While I reasoned thus Pudmini still clung to me in agony. All the terrors of the Palace had laid their bony hands upon her, and she saw nothing ahead but the Torture Chamber and, after hours of agony, an inglorious death. Then, an idea occurred to me, and I wondered that I had not thought of it before.

"When the king visits the island, and the women come to the Palace, how do they cross the lake?" I asked.

"By the passage under the water," she answered; "but 'tis guarded night and day at this end. Even if thou wert to attempt such

a thing, it would be impossible that it could succeed."

"'Tis equally impossible to remain here, sweetheart," I said; "both for thy sake and my own we must find a way for me to cross. It must be the passage or nothing."

A little sob escaped her as I said this. It seemed to her we were running into certain death.

"Who guards the passage at this end?" I inquired.

"An old woman," she answered, "but though she is old she sleeps lightly, and would be sure to hear thee if thou didst venture near her chamber. Then she would sound the alarm and thou wouldst be captured and killed."

"It must be managed somehow," said I. "Thinkest thou that 'twould be possible to call her to you? Then, while she is absent, I could get through and so back to the Palace."

She hesitated before she replied.

"If it must be, it must," she said at last with a sigh, "but oh, my lord, be careful. 'Tis not for myself I fear, but for thee. Thou knowest how cruel the king can be."

I could hazard a very good guess, but we

were wasting precious time in talking thus, and every moment was adding to our danger.

"Come, dear heart," I said, "let us be going. Lead the way and I will follow thee."

"Step lightly then," said she.

So saying, she led the way from the summer-house and down the path past the palm and between the sweet-smelling myrtle and pomegranate trees; then down some steps, across a marble courtyard, in which a fountain played, to another terrace, whence we entered the palace by a low doorway. For the first time I stood within the sacred portals of the king's Zenana.

By the light of a low lamp, which hung from the ceiling at the further end of the narrow passage, I could just discern my whereabouts. The sickly scent with which I was familiar in the Palace across the water was here almost overpowering. The wail of a child's voice came from a distant room and, a moment later, the voice of the mother soothing it. Still Pudmini led me on till we reached a small inner court, lighted by another lamp, similar to the one in the passage by which we had first entered. Here the Queen turned to me and said in a whisper:

"The entrance to the passage under the

lake lies beyond yonder curtain. Hide thyself here while I call the old woman to my apartment. Then be swift, my lord, and above all take care, when thou dost reach the Palace on the other side, that no one sees thee, or thou willt fare as ill as here."

I folded her to my heart in one last embrace, then let her go. She immediately sped away, and when she had gone I looked about me for a place in which to hide. It was more difficult to find, however, than she had thought. At last, however, I drew aside a curtain that covered a door on the opposite side of the corridor to that on which was the entrance to the passage, and hid myself behind it. Into what room this door led, and what risks I ran, should whoever occupied it venture out and discover me, I did not pause to think. 'Twas no time for half measures. Then I stood still and waited. A minute or two later I heard Pudmini's voice, bidding the old woman come to her. She called for some time in vain. The old crone slept sound, and in spite of the Queen's assurance that she was a light sleeper, 'twas evident that it required more than the latter's melodious voice to wake her. I was beginning to despair of success, and was about to venture out of my hiding-

place, in order to run the risk of passing the old soul and getting into the passage without her hearing me, when, through the crevices of the curtain, I saw a woman, whom I could only suppose to be one of the Queen's attendants, disappearing in the direction of the passage. Presently she returned, bringing with her the beldame for whom I tarried. They passed along in the direction of the Queen's apartments, and, as soon as they were gone, I slipped from my hiding-place and hastened in the direction of the passage. There could be no fear of my mistaking my way, for it ran plain enough before me. The old woman's room lay to the right of another curtain, similar to that behind which I had lately been hidden. On the other side was a flight of steps down which I hastened. When I reached the bottom, I found myself in a narrow stone passage, or tunnel as 'twould be best perhaps to call it. Like the corridors of the Palace above, it was dimly lighted by means of hanging lamps, so that there was need to fear lest I might not be able to find my way. So far Good Fortune had indeed attended me, but as I reflected, there was still the castle on the other side to be accounted for. And this might very well prove my undoing.

Remembering the short distance that separated the castle from the island, when looking across the water, I was not prepared for the length of the tunnel. In my anxiety to get to the other side, it seemed as if 'twere miles in length. Who had built it, or how long it had been in existence, I could not say. It was well-constructed, and only in a few places were there any signs of leakage from the lake above. At last, as may be supposed, not too soon for my happiness, I found that the floor was gradually ascending. This, at last, took the form of another flight of steps. Then the same sickly smell I have already described told me that I was no longer under the lake, but in the vicinity of the Palace itself. It behoved me now to have my wits about me, for it was possible I might at any moment stumble on some member of the king's household, who would lose no time in giving the alarm. With a beating heart I mounted the steps, softly pushed open the door, and, having removed my shoes, stepped into the same corridor in which was the small window whence the first message from the Queen had been thrown to me. Well acquainted as I was, by this time, with the outside of the Palace, I knew nothing of the inside; and was

therefore quite unable to say in which direction I should proceed to reach the outer world. One wrong turning, I knew, might land me in hopeless difficulties; yet proceed I must, for to remain where I was now would have been as bad as to have stayed in the Lake Palace. Still stepping as cautiously as before, I made my way down the corridor, only to find myself in a part of the Palace with which I had no previous acquaintance. By this time I was growing desperate. I was like a man walking in a dream, who only escapes one pitfall to fall into another. The Palace was a rabbit-warren of small passages. Beautiful as the great Halls of Audience might be, the remainder of the building, to a man placed as I was, was horrible in the extreme. I was still pursuing my eventful course when something happened which came near proving my ruin altogether. Fearing to proceed further in the direction I was following, I had turned and was retracing my steps, when by some mischance, in the half dark, I almost stepped upon a man who lay asleep across one of the small corridors. It is possible he may have been a member of the rajah's guard, but, whether he was or not, the fact remains that, before I knew what I was doing, I had touched

him. For a moment my heart seemed to stand still. Roused by my touch, he was about to sit up and look about him, when I made up my mind. Without giving him time to see me, I seized his throat from behind with both hands, and pressed him down again. He struggled violently, but I had the advantage of him, and, strong man though he was, he soon saw that he was no match for me. Sometimes in my dreams I live that fight over again, and wake up with the sweat streaming down my face. Clutching his throat tighter and tighter, so that he should not cry out, I forced him down until I felt his limbs relax and knew that his senses were leaving him. Still I did not leave go, nor was I going to so long as sufficient strength remained in him to sound the alarm. When, at last, I withdrew my hand, it was because he was beyond doing me any harm. Then, without further waste of time, I took to my heels and sped along the dismal corridors for my very life. If he should recover before I could find a way out, I should be caught like a rat in a trap. At last my sorrow came to an end. Finding myself at the top of a small flight of steps, I descended them only to come within an ace of bumping my head and breaking my shins against a small

door at the bottom. This, by some good chance, was fastened only with a bar. In less time than it takes to tell I had removed it, and was out in the fresh night air once more.

The place in which I found myself was a small courtyard near the main gate, and leading out of that in which the elephant combat took place. To make my way to my own quarters was a matter of small difficulty, yet before I entered them, I went in search of my rope, and, having secured it, stood upon the battlements and looked across at the White Palace, which I could just see under the stars. I had succeeded in effecting my escape, but how had it fared with the Queen? I felt that I would have given all that I possessed in the world to be assured of her safety. Then I entered our room, where the heavy breathing of the Captain told me that he was still asleep. I was thankful, indeed, for this.

When I woke next morning my first care was to ascertain whether the Captain was aware of my absence on the previous night. It soon became plain to me, however, that he was not; he congratulated me on my good night's rest, and vowed that it would be an excellent preparation for the fatigues of the coming day. Having taken council with my-

self I decided not to tell him of my adventure. For many reasons, I argued, it was more expedient that I should not. I had yet to hear what the rajah would have to say upon the subject when he heard his servant's tale. In that case would he suspect one of us of having been in the Palace on the previous night? I felt that it was very probable he would. However, as we were leaving the city that day it would not matter very much what he thought, so long as he did not visit his suspicions, or his wrath, on the hapless Queen. After all I had been through in the last forty-eight hours, it was a relief to turn my attention to the work necessary for getting the troops upon the march. With such success was this accomplished that, by the time the sun rose, the city was some considerable distance behind us, and the army of Jahlmeer, for the first time since it had been placed upon a European footing, was on its way to do battle for the honour of the State.

CHAPTER XI

Of all that took place during the five months that we were absent from the city, it would be impossible, even did space permit, for me to furnish you with a full and complete description. It was a period of unceasing labour, of continued excitement, and also of no small amount of military glory. With but few exceptions our troops proved themselves well worthy of the confidence we had reposed in them. Having defeated the Rajah of Marwat in the open field, after a battle lasting some ten hours, in which upward of a thousand men were killed on our side, and more than twice that number killed, wounded, and taken prisoners on theirs, we marched upon and invested their capital. When this had been stormed and taken, and more loot taken than could be conveniently carried away, we added to the total of our victories by defeating the forces of the rajah's principal ally, Mir Khan. So elated were we by our success, that it would have been pos-

sible to have marched to Delhi itself, but this The O'Rourke, being for once of a prudent turn of mind, would not permit, having decided to return to Jahlmeer, in order to recruit his forces, the ranks of which were thinned by the many losses we had sustained.

"Did I not say it would be so?" he cried on one occasion, as we sat together in our tent, puffing his chest out and beaming upon me as he spoke. "Yet, mark my words, this is only the beginning. With such material to work upon, we will get together the finest army in the world. Kings shall see and envy it. Together we will build up a country such as no man has ever dreamed of. In it we will reign as emperors together."

Alas! for the Captain. How little he guessed what the upshot of his proud boast was to be! How little he dreamt then that in a few short weeks the army, in which he had placed such trust, and upon which he had spent so much time and care, would be—but there, I am getting forward with my story all too quickly. There is still something to be told before I can speak of that.

'Twas at the commencement of the cold weather that we started upon our glorious return to the city. The rajah had sent mes-

sages, expressive of his good-will and approval, to the victorious general, accompanied by presents of great value for us both. Indeed, as the Captain pointed out, we were both rich men now, so rich indeed, that, should we ever return to England, Halliday, the man who had robbed me of Cicely, would be poor indeed compared with us. But for the moment we had no thought to spare for England, and I least of all. Being prudent, however, and knowing something of the uncertainty which is apt to attend the possession of riches in the Indies, we had invested our fortunes in precious stones, which are easily convertible into money when occasion requires, and, being of a convenient size, may be carried about without their possession being at all suspected.

'Twas on the day following our receipt of these practical proofs of his Highness's goodwill toward us that we encamped upon a plain some thirty miles removed from the city. The food supply of the army having run somewhat short, we had at first intended pushing on by a forced march to our destination, but while we were preparing, news of the utmost importance reached us from the country we had left behind us. 'Twas said that the Rajah of Marwat, far from being so completely

routed as we had supposed, had reassembled his forces, and taking as his allies the successor to Mir Khan on the one side, and his neighbour of Jeylaud upon the other, was hastening after us at the head of some eighteen thousand men. Nothing daunted, the intrepid Captain determined to give them battle. Accordingly we turned ourselves about and retraced our steps. Flushed by their previous successes, and believing implicitly in the generalship of their leader, our troops entertained no sort of doubt as to the result. Three days after receiving the news we reached the scene of our first battle, where we found the enemy already drawn up, eager to wipe out the disgrace of their previous encounters if such a thing were possible.

All that night the Captain and I remained hard at work, preparing our plans for the battle on the morrow. Like the prudent commander he was, The O'Rourke left nothing to chance, so that when the sun rose next morning, we were fully prepared for the fray. The picture presented at daybreak, when the two troops stood face to face with each other upon the plain, was one of singular beauty. The greater portion of the enemy's forces consisted of cavalry; stalwart men, warriors by birth

and training, clad in chain armour, and wearing glittering helmets, with high plumes, upon their heads. On our right the artillery were stationed, on the left were our cavalry, with several battalions of infantry between. The remainder of the troops were held in reserve upon a neighbouring hill. The sun had scarcely been half an hour above the edge of the plain before the battle commenced. It was not until night had fallen, however, and our artillery had been captured, our infantry cut almost to pieces by the terrible onslaughts of the Marwat cavalry, that it came to an end. By that time the greater portion of what remained of our once grand army was in full flight. In vain the Captain, almost beside himself with fury, endeavoured to reassemble them. Forgetful of his powers in the past, and conscious that it was useless for them to stand against an enemy who rode them down like dogs, they lost faith in all European methods. When next they went forth to fight, they declared it would be after the fashion of their fathers, mounted and armed with tulwar and with battleaxe.

"Come," said the Captain, when night had fallen and the defeat was certain, "it is useless for us to tarry here. We had best get

back to the city and meet the king face to face. We have still to place the rightful heir upon the throne. That done we must find the men to help us seize the citadel, make Pertab Sing our prisoner within the next few days. After that we will reorganize the army and try our conclusions with the enemy once again."

Giving the order to such of our cavalry as still remained loyal to us, we set out for the city as fast as our horses could carry us. Dangerous work, indeed, had we to carry out when we arrived there. It was not of that, however, I was thinking. I was recalling the fact that every mile was bringing me nearer to the Queen, of whom I heard nothing since the moment when I had bade her farewell in the Lake Palace. If she were dead, or so much as one single hair of her head were injured, I would have my revenge on the rajah as soon as he was in my power. Small wonder was it, therefore, these things being considered, that I called continually upon the Captain to push on with greater speed. Every moment might mean life or death to her. The sound of the night wind moaning across the desert, over which we galloped, rang in my ears like a woman's cry for help.

"On, on," I cried. "'Tis only a snail's

pace at which we are travelling. On, on, or we shall be too late."

The Captain said nothing, but I noticed that he urged his horse to greater exertions. The poor beast, having borne his weight for so many hours, was growing weary, while my own, having been ridden since the dawn of day, was in little better case. At last, and just as day was breaking, we saw ahead of us the city with the rock-bound castle rising out of it. Riding as fast as we had done, it was scarcely likely that any other messenger would have reached it before us. It was plain that the news of our coming had been brought to the king, for, when we toiled into the great yard (our horses had fallen exhausted on the steep ascent to the gate, and our troopers were far behind), he was there upon the steps, with his court, in readiness to receive us.

"What news? what news?" he cried, though he must have seen on our faces the direful intelligence that we brought.

"The day is lost!" answered the Captain, who stood before him, coated from head to foot with dust, and with a weary look in his eyes. "We were opposed by a force that outnumbered us by nearly three to one. Our men, taking fright at the onslaught of the

enemy, turned and fled after having stood their ground until the sun had set."

"Fled?" cried the king, as if he could not believe that he heard aright. "My army fled?"

Then he paused, while his eyes flashed fire, and everybody about him bent like reeds in the violence of his wrath. The Captain alone seemed to entertain no fear of him. For my part I hated him so that I could readily have killed him where he stood.

"By Indur and the name of Rajput, so this is the end of our warfare is it? My honour is gone, because I trusted in you, and my face has been blackened before my enemies. And 'tis thy doings, dog, and that of the man with thee. But, by the gods, I will repay."

He looked so evil as he said this that I found it difficult to refrain from putting my hand to my sword. I managed to do so, however, and I was thankful for my forbearance, when, a moment later, the king called Lakwan Rao to him and they departed together into the Palace.

"Come," said the Captain, turning to me, as if he were weary of the struggle. "Let us go to our own quarters. I am tired and must sleep."

I followed him without a word, but, anxious as I was for tidings of the Queen, I could no more have closed my eyes than I could have prevented the catastrophe which had so completely overwhelmed us the day previous. When we reached the battlements I looked about me. There lay the White Palace, resting on the bosom of the blue waters, and to all appearances as peaceful as when I had seen it last. What had happened there in all the months that we had been absent was what I desired to find out. But how was I to do it? I turned this question over and over in my mind, while the Captain lay asleep upon his bed. Legends of the dark deeds enacted on the island by the rajah's orders were common enough in the castle, and my heart turned sick within me as I thought that the fate of the woman I loved might be such as had been described to me. Unable to rest or to think of anything but my overwhelming anxiety, I paced the battlements, hoping against hope for some sign from her that would allay the pain I was suffering, but none came. Had it not been for the Captain, I could have found it in my heart, now that the boat was gone, to have invaded the sacred precincts of the castle and to have made my way through

the tunnel to the White Palace, even if I had been compelled to cut a passage through the rajah's soldiers with my sword to get there.

When I returned to our quarters it was to find Bagh Sing there, in earnest conversation with the Captain.

"There is more bad news," said the Captain, looking up at me as I entered. "Bagh Sing brings bad tidings indeed. The young Prince has been found and stolen."

"It is even as he says," answered Bagh Sing, speaking low, as if he were afraid of being overheard. "Pertab Sing has discovered the child's whereabouts by chance and brought him here. It is not known whether there was treachery at work, but that matters not, now that the child is dead."

"So he is dead," I repeated, with scarcely more interest than I should have shown had he told me that the king's pet ape was sick. Under the burden of my own anxiety the death of the infant rajah appeared a very small affair.

"Was the lad murdered in the Palace?" asked the Captain, on whom the blow had fallen with great weight.

"I know not," Bagh Sing replied. "But

I have been told that 'twas in the women's palace out yonder."

As he said this I gave a start of surprise. He was watching me and our eyes met. I saw that I had betrayed myself. The suspicions he must have already entertained were confirmed, and I knew him well enough to judge that the news would be carried to the rajah without delay.

"Bagh Sing," a great fit of rage suddenly taking possession of me, "false dog that you are, 'tis you who were the traitor. 'Twas you who sold the young Prince to his death."

The Captain sprang to his feet.

"What mean you by this?" he cried, swinging round upon me. "How know you that he is a traitor?"

"Because I had been told by one who knows that he had betrayed us," I answered, without thinking of the consequences.

"'Twas the Queen told you," cried Bagh Sing triumphantly. "'Twas the night that the boat was lost, and you tried to kill the king's guard. But if you triumphed then, Pertab Sing has had his vengeance since."

"Vengeance," I faltered, scarce able in my terrible fear to speak the words aloud.

"Ay, vengeance," he answered, mocking-

ly, for though a traitor he was not afraid. "Love thee as she may, Pudmini will rest in thy arms no more. The false Queen has gone——"

I waited to hear no more, but drawing a pistol from my pocket, I placed it against his head and shot him dead before he could complete his sentence. His brains spattered the wall and he fell upon the cushions a corpse.

"My God, man, what have you done?" cried the Captain in terror. "You have sealed our fate."

"'Tis sealed before," I answered, in a voice I scarcely recognised as my own, so fierce and terrible was it. "This hell-hound and the devil his master you may be sure have arranged this matter between them. But there may be still some time to escape. Seize it if you can. For my part I go to find the Queen and perhaps to die with her."

He endeavoured to detain me, but I shook him off and ran from the room, scarcely conscious of what I was doing. Almost before I knew where I was I had reached the little door in the courtyard, the same by which I had made my escape the night I had seen my poor, lost love. Sword in hand, for I would

have run anyone through who might have tried to stop me, I climbed the stairs and turned along the corridor leading to the passage. The tumult that existed in the king's portion of the Palace must have accounted for the fact; it is certain, however, that I met no one before I reached the passage. Having gained the tunnel I hastened along it until I reached the ascent at the further end. As I drew back the curtain, the old woman, who was its guard, confronted me. She gave a cry and drew back a step or two.

"What seek ye?" she asked. "Know ye not that it is death for a man to enter here? Turn back or I sound the alarm."

But the sword in my hand and the look upon my face proved too much for the situation.

"'Tis no use prating to me of turning back," I said. "I bid thee take me to the Queen."

"The Queen?" she echoed, as if she did not understand. "Whom mean ye by the Queen?"

"Take me to Pudmini. Is she not the Queen?" I answered.

There must have been a touch of pity left

in that withered heart, for she shook her head sadly and heaved a sigh.

"Come," she said at last, and as she spoke she beckoned to me with her withered hand. "Follow me and I will take thee to the Queen."

CHAPTER XII

SCARCELY conscious of what I was doing, and filled only with a great desire to be with the Queen, whether she was alive or dead, I followed the old crone along the passage, the same through which I had hurried on the night on which the boat had drifted away from the summer-house. A few moments later we reached the place where Pudmini had bade me farewell, and, having done so, made our way along another passage till we reached a flight of steps. We descended these, passing deeper and deeper, until we were down in the very vaults of the Palace itself. The light of the lamp which the old woman had taken from a stand, and now held above her head, played fitfully on the streaming walls, and as I saw them and remembered the girl for whom we were searching, my heart turned sick with fear within me. At last we reached the bottom, where the old woman drew the bar of a door, and afterward pushed it open.

"She that was the Queen is here," she

croaked, turning her vulture face toward me, "and 'tis for love of thee that she is where she is. Knowest thou that? Enter and behold thy handiwork!"

Holding the lamp aloft in order that I might see where I was going, she pointed to the open door. I entered, but for the moment, so blinded by the dark was I, that I could see nothing of what lay before me. Then I saw, stretched upon a rude pallet by the wall, a human figure. The face was turned from me, and so still did she lie that I could not say whether she were alive or dead. I threw myself upon the floor by her side and took possession of one of her tiny hands.

"Pudmini," I whispered, "Pudmini, my love, my Queen."

No! she was not dead, for as she heard my voice she turned her face toward me. Oh! pitiful Heaven! what a change was it I saw there. I recoiled from it as if I had been struck. Pinched and shrunken almost to a shadow of her former self, she was only skin and bone. And—but there, how can I tell the tale as it must be told? Those eyes which had once gazed into mine with such love and tenderness, would never look upon the world again. Their light was blotted out forever.

"After all, thou hast come then, my lord," she whispered. "They told me long since that thou wert dead and had died cursing me. 'Tis a little thing, but I would rather it had been true than that thou shouldst have seen me as I am now."

I choked down the sob that was rising in my throat and tried to place my hand beneath the little head upon the pallet, but she bade me let her lie.

"'Tis the end of all things for me," said she. "Forget me not, therefore, when thou art far away. The end is very near. I have prayed that it might come soon, but the gods have been more merciful than man. Have I not, at least, seen thee before I go?"

Her words tore at my heart-strings, but there was nothing I could say that would comfort her. Never had I dreamt the world could contain so much sorrow, or Providence give man so few means of expressing it.

"Dost remember the night when first we met?" she asked softly.

"I remember," I answered. "Would that it had been the last. Had it been so thou wouldst not have been here like this. 'Tis my doing and the gods will avenge."

"Nay, nay," she replied. "Thou must

not speak so. I would not have had it otherwise."

Here the old woman interposed and bade her be silent, and think of the king she had dishonoured. I sternly bade her hold her peace. Was not the Queen paying for her love with her life? 'Twould be time for the king and I to talk together when she was gone. That it would not be very long before that happened I could plainly see. 'Twas my coming, alone, that had given the last flicker to the flame of her poor life.

"Thou wilt go away to thine own country," she continued; "there will be other women who will love thee there, but not one so well as Pudmini, the faithless Queen."

I still held her hand in mine, as if by so doing I could strengthen the frail bonds that tied her to life, but little by little they were slipping through my fingers till at last they were broken altogether. Seeing that she did not speak I bent over the bed and looked at her. I called her by name, and implored her by every word of love to speak to me. But it was of no avail. No answer came. *She was dead.*

Then I rose, without emotion, without

tears, conscious of but one desire, to slay the man who had killed her.

"She is dead, Pudmini is dead," cried the old woman behind me. "There have been others whom I have seen in this place who did not take so long to die. Knowest thou that I was once a Queen myself, and a ruler of the hearts of men?"

I did not heed her ravings, but stooped over the bed and kissed the shrunken face upon the pillow.

"Farewell, Pudmini," I said slowly, every word making as if it would rend me in pieces. "It was not destined that I should die with thee, but at least I can avenge thee."

Then, without so much as a glance at the woman behind me, I left the dungeon and went up the stairs once more. 'Twas as if my heart had turned to solid ice within my breast. Yet in my head a fire was raging that was like to consume me. I crossed the women's palace, as before, descended the steps to the passage under the lake, and presently came to the castle itself. Of the Captain I had not a thought. There was only one man in the world at that moment who had any interest for me, and him I was going to find at whatever cost to myself. Scarcely conscious

in which direction I was going, I walked on and on, threaded corridor after corridor, until at last, drawing aside a curtain, I found myself standing, somewhat suddenly, in the White Hall of Audience. A council was proceeding, and the rajah himself was present, seated upon his throne of brass and ivory. With him was the Prime Minister, Lakwan Rao, who stood upon the right hand of his Majesty, the chief of the nobles being on his left. Before him, towering head and shoulders above the crowd, was the great figure of the Captain. Hearing my step upon the stones as I burst open the door, they turned, and gazed at me in astonishment. Well indeed might they have done so, for a stranger figure than I presented then could scarcely be imagined. My hair lay scattered upon my shoulders as if it had not been brushed for a month, my clothes were soiled with the damp and dirt of that loathsome dungeon. There was also the look of madness in my eyes that was not to be mistaken. It was not until that moment I remembered that I had left my sword in the dungeon by Pudmini's body. That mattered nothing, however. If I had not a sword, I told myself, I would take my vengeance with my bare hands. I saw the king half rise upon

his throne, and a look of fury spread over his countenance. Our eyes met, and my face must have told him whence I had come. I heard the Captain call upon my name, but I paid no heed to him. As I strode toward the king, the crowd of courtiers fell back on either hand.

"Murderer," I cried, "I have seen her!" Then, snatching a jewelled tulwar from the belt of a man who stood near me, I rushed upon the king, and, before any man could strike a blow in his defence, the days of Pertab Sing, Rajah of Jahlmeer, were at an end. As he fell, a cry went up, then the strain broke, and the crowd rushed upon me. In a moment the Captain had sprung to my side, and his great blade was whistling above his head; but it had no effect upon them. The king's death had maddened them, and, heedless of the result, they hurled themselves upon us.

"Fight, lad, fight for your life," cried the Captain in English. "Make for the door and cut down every man who tries to stop you."

My blood tingles even now when I think of the fight that followed. After all I had suffered that day, 'twas as grateful to me as a draught of cool spring water would be to a man dying of thirst. The Captain himself

had surely never acquitted himself better. Outnumbering us as the enemy did by nearly twenty-five to one, 'twas marvellous that they did not cut us down at once. However, good fortune favoured us, and still keeping them at bay, we drew nearer to the door. The white marble floor was stained with blood, until it looked like a shambles; the groans of dying men mingled with the shouts of their companions and the laughter that issued from my lips. Twice I tried to reach Lakwan Rao, but each time I failed. 'Twas my desire to send him to join his master, and the fellow knew it and avoided me.

"Make for the door," cried the Captain, as he saw that we were diverging from it.

The enemy must have divined our intentions, for they tried to interpose themselves between us and the place we were making for. The Captain's quick eyes detected the movement and realized that if they succeeded escape was hopeless. Putting forth all his gigantic strength, he rushed upon them, mowing them down like grass, while I followed his example to the best of my ability, though my strength was fast leaving me. Then for one moment I turned my head, and saw that the day was lost for us. The noise of the fighting

had called up the king's guard, who were ascending the steps toward the doorway. The Captain saw this as soon as I did, and I fancy even his heart must have failed him. A moment later someone struck me a heavy blow from behind, and I stumbled and fell forward at the Captain's feet. Yet though I could not move a finger to help myself, by some strange chance my senses did not leave me. A moment later the Captain stooped and picked me up with one arm as if I had been a little child. Then with a shout he rushed upon the crowd, cutting and hacking his way toward the door through which I had entered. At last he reached it, and, having done so, just managed to close it and bolt it after us.

'Twas all done so suddenly that the enemy had scarcely time to be aware of it before we were beyond their reach. The advantage, however, that we had gained was but small, seeing that there were so many other doors that led into that portion of the Palace.

"Quick," cried the Captain, "I have horses waiting in the courtyard below, if we can only reach them. Is it possible you can walk so far?"

With difficulty I managed to get on to my feet and to follow him toward the little door

by which on another and equally momentous occasion I had left the Palace. The cries of those behind us came faintly in and spurred us on to greater efforts. The next few minutes, we both knew, would decide our fate. Would it be possible for us to reach the courtyard unperceived? Unless we could do so the chances were against our escape. Wearied as we were by what we had gone through, we could not hope to contend with them for long. And what was worse, their ranks would be reinforced, not only by the rajah's guards, but also by every soldier in the garrison. For my own part, at that moment I had very little care as to whether I escaped or not. Had it not been for my companion I would have been content to meet my death, sword in hand, where I stood. For his sake, however, I knew that I must make an effort. But it was difficult, for I was still half-dazed by the blow I had received, and every step I took was at the cost of indescribable agony. In less time than it takes to tell, we had descended the steps and had opened the door. To our delight the courtyard was empty, though how long it would remain so was quite another matter.

"Come now," whispered the Captain,

" our lives depend upon the speed with which we reach the horses. They are in the next yard. Then, please God, we'll give them the slip after all."

We were more than half way across the yard, when the thing we feared happened. Our enemies who had followed us through the Palace by another route, now came pouring headlong from the little door by which we had just made our exit. A yell of triumph went up as they caught sight of us. Had only one precious moment more been permitted us, we should have been safely out of their clutches. That moment, however, was wanting. We had reached the corner and were in the act of turning into the second courtyard, when several shots were fired at us. One struck me in the side, and, without more ado, I fell forward on my face. A moment later the Captain had picked me up once more, as easily as he had done in the Hall of Audience, and was running with me toward where the horses stood awaiting us. Fortunately the enemy had not been aware of their presence there, otherwise 'tis certain they would have removed them, and thus have had us at their mercy. The animal nearest us was the Captain's great stallion, Akbar. Seeing his beloved master, he whin-

nied and began to paw the ground. Realizing that it was hopeless to expect me to ride in my present condition, the Captain threw me up and across the saddle, then he seated himself behind me, and at the moment that he did so the enemy turned the corner. They had caught us now. But no! It was with a desperate man they had to deal. With a shout of defiance my companion turned the horse's head toward the steps that led to the battlements. Strange thing though it was to ask of a horse, the gallant beast did what was required of him, and, with a wild clatter of hoofs, we reached the battlements. Below us lay the lake, sparkling in the afternoon sun, and in its centre the White Palace, in a dungeon of which lay my poor, dead Queen. What did the Captain intend to do now that he was here? It seemed impossible we could fail to be captured. Yet my companion seemed confident enough.

"There's nothing for it but to try the leap," he said. "'Tis kill or cure with us. So here goes."

By this time the enemy had also reached the battlements, but they came no further, for they were about to witness a deed that held them spellbound. Choosing the place where

I had pulled him up on the night that he had ridden to Marwat, he set the horse at it. At that point the parapet was some three feet high; but the drop upon the other side could scarcely have been less than thirty. 'Twas, as he had said, a case of kill or cure. But that we should be *killed* seemed the more probable. Whether or not the horse was conscious of what was being asked of him, I can not say, but it is certain that when his master called upon him for the effort, he dashed forward, gathered himself together for the leap, shot into the air, and then seemed to fall through space. Beyond belief though it may seem, he landed safely on the soft sand below the wall, and, though I came near to falling from his back, the Captain managed to save me in time. Then we were off and away again. But not before the battlements were lined with the enemy, and several shots had been fired at us.

"It won't be very long, you may be sure, before they will be after us," said the Captain; "but we've got a good start, and if only we can reach Ganaut in safety, we may snap our fingers at them."

At the moment it seemed as if he might just as well have talked of reaching England as Ganaut.

If to-day I shut my eyes I can recall the whole scene as vividly as if I were still there —the great dry plain over which galloped the horse carrying his double burden. I can hear the ring of his hoofs upon the stones, and the whistle of the wind as he sped along. Brave beast, he could not have done his duty more nobly had he been galloping for the salvation of a kingdom, instead of saving the lives of two men who had been engaged in wrecking one. Now and again the Captain looked behind him, but no sign of the enemy could he discover. When we had been galloping for more than an hour he brought the horse to a standstill beside a tank, a large stone affair, fed by a rivulet from the hills. With some difficulty he dismounted and afterward lifted me down. It was then that we discovered the fact that the horse's shoulder, and also the fore part of the saddle, were stained with blood. The Captain, observing this, looked concerned.

"I must see to your wound at once," he said.

Then bidding me lie down, he knelt beside me, and, when he had cut away the clothes that covered it, carefully and tenderly examined the wound. Having cleansed it, he

bound it up as best he could, and when all was finished, devoted his attention to the horse. When we were rested somewhat, we mounted once more and continued our flight as before. From that point forward the country became more difficult to travel over. But we had to take it as we found it, rough and smooth alike. Weakened by the blood I had lost, consciousness must have left me, for I have no recollection of anything that happened until I found myself, later on, being lifted from the horse in the courtyard of another palace. It was dark, and men with torches stood about to light us. A tall man, with a fine presence, a Rajput by his beard, was questioning the Captain, and was finding it difficult to believe that we had ridden from Jahlmeer in so short a time.

"By Indur, 'tis a brave deed," he said, when he had heard everything. "I would that I had men and horses who would do so much."

After that he gave orders that I should be carefully tended. The Captain had, until then, been standing beside his wearied horse; now he came toward me. But before he could reach me he tottered, and next moment had fallen like a log upon the stones of the

courtyard. When they carried him to his chamber and examined him, it was found that there were no less than three large wounds upon his body, one of which had been made by a bullet; yet, despite this fact, he had never complained, nor had he once permitted me to suppose that he was in pain. All through that agonizing ride he had not once thought of himself; but always of me. Only when safety had been reached did his giant strength and resolution give way. Seeing him fall I tried to rise and go to him, but 'twas more than I could accomplish. The exertion, even of moving, was too much for me, and once more I fell back in a swoon.

It had been night when we reached the castle; it was still night when I opened my eyes again. I looked about me for the Captain but could see no sign of him. An old man was sitting beside my bed, and I questioned him concerning my friend. He, however, could tell me nothing, save that the Captain's wounds were deemed to be serious, and that he was in a chamber not far distant from where I lay. Being still too weak to go in search of him, I was fain to be content with what he told me. As I soon discovered, a day had elapsed since our arrival at Ganaut.

"The sleep has done the sahib good," said the old man, who was plainly in charge of me. "The sahib has slept since first I laid him upon this bed. Now, 'twould be well to sleep again."

I closed my eyes and did as he bade me; the mere speaking of even so few words having tired me.

When I woke again it was broad daylight, and I was a different man. My wound had been dressed and was now progressing as favourably as could be expected. The mark of it, however, I shall carry to my death-bed, as a reminder, if one were needed, of our ride from Jahlmeer to Ganaut. As soon as I was conscious of anything, I inquired after the Captain. The old man, however, put the question aside, and, seeing what his desire was, a great fear took possession of me, believing as I did that he was attempting to withhold some evil tidings from me.

"If the sahib will but have patience," he said, "he will hear everything, when his strength has come back to him. In the meantime, 'twould be well if he laid upon his bed once more."

But this was more than I could do.

I could remain where I was no longer.

Happen what might, at the risk of opening my wound afresh, I felt that I must find the Captain.

"Take me to him," I said, when I had dressed myself.

Seeing that I was determined, the old man conducted me from the room, along a narrow passage, toward a chamber that looked upon the courtyard where we had been received by the Rajah. There I found the Captain stretched out upon his bed. Even in so short a time a great change had come over him. As I approached the bed he looked up and saw me. A faint smile of recognition appeared upon his face.

"Ah, dear lad," said he, "'tis good to see you about once more. I was afraid those devils had laid you by the heels, as they have done me."

I told him that I was much stronger, and inquired after his condition.

"I fear 'tis all over with me," he answered. Then, seeing the pain he gave me, he was quick to add, "Nay, nay, don't look so sad about it; 'tis the fortune of war. A soldier must take his chance."

His voice dropped a little as he said it, and the latter portion of his speech was spoken in

a whisper. His strength was almost spent, and the man who had played with the wrestlers as if they had been dolls, whose glory had been in his strength, was now as feeble as a little child. Yet I could not believe it to be true that he would die—I could not convince myself that the man I loved better than any other on earth was really to be taken from me.

"I have known it ever since I took to my bed," he answered. "It will not be very long now. Dost remember our first meeting in the Fleet, Charles?"

I nodded my head—'twas all I could do. There was a lump in my throat that was like to choke me.

"'Twas a good meeting," he continued, "and since then we have seen many strange things together. We have been good comrades, and what can soldiers wish for more? Had it not been for those traitors yonder, we'd have built up an empire and have reigned together. But they beat us in the end, and here we are. I should have liked to crack a bottle with old Lawyer Pennyfeather again, but 'tis plain that's not to be either. If the old man is living when you reach England, tell him that the Captain spoke of him to the last and

would have liked to have shaken him by the hand."

At this I broke down altogether, vowing that I could not let him go, and that I wished I might die instead; and that he had been the truest friend I had ever had.

He held out his great hand to me.

"Heart up, heart up!" said he; then, with an attempt at his old manner, he gave the order that there should be "no repining in the camp," and fell back upon his pillow in a swoon once more. All through that day, heedless of what went on around me, of everything save the fact that the life of my friend was slowly ebbing from him, I remained beside him. Once or twice his senses returned to him, but only for a few brief moments. For the greater portion of the time he lay quite still, his hands folded upon his breast and his eyes closed as if in sleep. Once he made a sign to me to stoop down.

"Do not forget the stones," he whispered, "they are stitched in the lining of my coat. They are yours now."

I tried to put the matter aside, but when I saw that my refusal pained him, I did as he bade me and took from their hiding-place the

stones which were his fortune, and which he had worked so hard to win.

"I little thought when we first met that I should have so much to leave thee," he whispered, as the stones sparkled in the light. "We had less between us in the Fleet."

Then he closed his eyes once more, and it was upward of an hour before they opened again. Then he made a movement of his hand, which I took. It was cold and clammy. The end was very near now. After a while he looked up at me, and a smile spread over his face.

"Charles," he said simply. Only the one word, and then 'twas all over, and I was alone.

Of my grief I will say nothing here. I had endured so much during the past few days that it seemed as if happiness had gone out of my life forever. The rajah endeavoured to console me, but I was past comfort. All I craved now was to be away and to be done with the Indies forever.

That night we performed the last sad rites. By the rajah's order a funeral pyre had been erected upon the river bank, beyond the castle walls. All having been prepared, we bore the body to it and placed it on the couch we had prepared. Then, torch in hand, as his friend

and mourner I stood beside it and gazed for the last time on the body of my friend. The fragrant wood took fire like tinder, the flames spread upward, and the crackling of the logs and the hissing of the flames sang the requiem of the Captain, the gallant soldier, the faithful friend, and, last but not least, the gentleman adventurer.

. . . . . .

'Twas on a bright, crisp winter's day that the good ship Francis Drake, after a long and wearisome voyage, dropped her anchor in the river Thames, and I set foot in London town once more. Ever since that fateful day when I had bade the old lawyer farewell, I had heard no tidings from any one person connected with my old life. Now I was back once more to discover who was alive and who was dead, what changes time had wrought, and whether there were any who remembered me.

After the long voyage from Calcutta, and the weariness of being confined in so small a vessel, it was like a new life that I stepped into. And yet there seemed but little change to be observed in London; the streets were as crowded as I remembered them, there was the same noise and confusion, indeed it was as if I had never been away at all. Yet in place of

the man of fashion who had bade it good-bye with such eagerness, there was a traveller who stared about him like a countryman come for the first time to town. It was not long, however, before the familiar manner of the place descended upon me once more, and indeed by the time I reached Pennyfeather's house, the sailor walk, the heaving as of a ship under one that makes it so strange to step ashore, had in a great measure left me.

During the long voyage I had been permitted plenty of leisure to reflect upon my position. I was now a rich man, I told myself, but of what use would my riches be to me since I had no one to enjoy them with me? Cicely by this time had been long married, and since Pudmini, my poor Queen, was dead, it was scarcely probable I should ever love again. Yet in my heart there was a longing to look upon the face of the woman I had lost. I wanted to assure myself that she was happy, and if she were, well then, even then, I fancied I could find it in my heart to forgive.

Having reached Mr. Pennyfeather's house I knocked upon the door and, with a strange feeling of nervousness for what I should hear in answer to my inquiry for the lawyer, waited for it to be opened. 'Twas no less a person

than Mistress Bridget herself who invited me to enter. At first, her sight having somewhat failed her, 'twas plain she did not know me, but when she had looked a second time, she uttered a cry of astonishment.

"Surely 'tis never Sir Charles Verrinder come home?" she exclaimed.

"The very same, Mistress Bridget," I replied. "Sir Charles Verrinder come home again. And the lawyer?"

"He stepped out but a few minutes since," she answered, looking up and down the street as if in search of him; "but he bade me say, if anyone should chance to call, that he would return without delay."

I thereupon determined to await his coming in his own room. At the same time I bade his housekeeper say nothing to him of my presence in the house. She promised compliance with my wishes, and after that I sat myself down to wait.

A quarter of an hour later I heard the old man enter and ascend the stairs. Presently he opened the door and entered the room. Much to my surprise, however, he did not appear to be so astonished at seeing me as I had expected. As it transpired, news had already been brought him of my home-coming.

Someone had seen me and had sped on to announce the fact to the old man.

"Then why on earth did you go out again?" I asked.

"Because I had a most important message to deliver," he answered. "One that would admit of no delay. That done, I returned to welcome you with all speed. My dear, dear lad, what a joy 'tis to see you back once more. Times out of number have I thought of you in that far country, wondering how the world fared with you, praying that you might be well, and hoping, so it seemed then, almost against hope, that my old eyes might look upon you once more before I should be called elsewhere."

Then he inquired after the Captain, and I could see that the message I gave him from our dead friend touched his heart.

"He was a brave man," he said. "I only wish he were with us to-day."

That was all. Indeed it seemed unnecessary to say more. His wish covered everything.

"And now one other question," he said, I thought a little hurriedly, as a coach drew up at the door. "What about the Lady Cicely?"

I gave a little start of pain. It seemed scarcely kind to speak of her when I was so newly arrived home.

"I hope Halliday has made her a good husband," I answered briefly. "I don't know that I have the right to be more concerned in her than to wish that."

"Does that mean that you have ceased to love her?" he inquired, with a look that was very like that of fear upon his face. "Perhaps you have married across the seas, and there is a Lady Verrinder to whom I have yet to be presented? If so——"

"There is no Lady Verrinder," I replied, still wondering at his curious behaviour; "and since Cicely is lost to me it is probable there never will be."

"Are you quite sure that she *is* lost to you?" he inquired. "What if I were to tell you that she did not marry Halliday after all? What if, by some unexpected legacy, her father became once more a rich man, and then turned the Cit, as I remember you were wont to call him, out of his house for good and all? What if the Lady Cicely, in spite of the offers of marriage she has received on every hand, has preferred to remain true to you? Would

you still say there would never be a Lady Verrinder?"

I must have turned pale, for he looked anxiously into my face, then poured me out a bumper of wine and bade me drink it.

"Is what you say true?" I faltered, scarcely daring to speak the words for fear he should be jesting with me. "Is it possible then that Cicely may still be mine?"

"It is more than possible, nay, it is most probable," the old fellow answered. "But we will let her speak for herself."

"Good Heavens, Pennyfeather, you don't say she is here, in this house?"

"If I am not mistaken," he replied. "That was her coach that stopped outside a moment since. 'Twas to her I sent the message of which I spoke to you just now. Sir Charles, you little know the goodness of that woman's heart. Since you went away she has permitted me the honour of her friendship; we have talked together of you for hours at a time. It's my belief, sir, that, even had you never returned, she would not have allowed another man to take your place."

Here my feelings overcame me altogether, and I turned and walked from him to the window. When I looked round again he was

gone, and in his place stood Cicely herself, a little older perhaps, but as beautiful as on the day that I had last seen her. She came toward me with hands outstretched, and would have kissed me, but I knelt before her, and, taking her hand, raised it devoutly to my lips.

"Cicely," I said, but my voice failed me. Had my life depended on it, I could not have uttered another word. Then in her gracious pity she stooped and raised me, kissing me upon the forehead as she did so.

"Charles, my own dear love," she said; "thank God you have come back to me at last."

THE END

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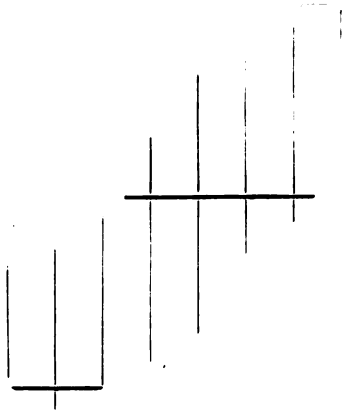
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